

May 29/30, 2004

## Let's Remember

Matthew 28:16-20

Pastor Bryan Clark

There is a lie that people have believed for thousands of years. It is that we can be our own gods—that we can be God. This past weekend with the tornado damage we were reminded again how absurd that notion is. Brad Brestel, Mark Geist and I were sitting in a motel room in Atlanta, Georgia listening to the weather channel. They kept saying that a tornado had destroyed everything one mile north of Firth. There are a couple of things one mile north of Firth: you have Mark's house and you have my house. The electricity was out, the cell phones were not going through, and all we could do was wait and wonder. In those moments I found myself sobered by the reality that I was totally helpless. There was not one thing I could do about that.

But then I got to thinking, *What if I were home? What would I do? Am I going to run out on the lawn and wrestle this tornado down?* If I were there, I would do what everybody else did. I would hunker down and wait. It is amazing that with billions of dollars of technology, the best we can do is hunker down and wait it out.

I was also struck in those moments with the reality that I was not helpless. I have access into the presence of the God of the universe; I can ask and He will listen. And so we did. We came back Sunday afternoon and drove through the carnage. Throughout the week I have been reminded over and over again of the miracle that only one life was lost, as tragic as that is. You hear one story and you find yourself thinking, *Wow, that was close. That was really lucky.* But you start hearing enough of those and you begin to realize, *Wait a minute. This was not luck at all. There had to have been a divine presence looking out for these people to explain why there was not more loss of life.* I was reminded that He is God; I am not. Because of that, He can do what I cannot do, whether I am at home or in Atlanta, Georgia.

This week as we have been driving through the rubble every day back and forth, I have also been reminded of some things we talked about last January. Sometimes when we talk about these things, they do not necessarily sink in. Then something like this just drives the point home.

I want to remind us of a couple of things that we recently talked about from Matthew chapter 6:

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust [*and tornadoes*] destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** (Matthew 6:19-21, \*NASB)

We talked about this in January—that the stuff of this world just won't last. These tornadoes did not destroy anything that wasn't going to be destroyed eventually anyway, with the exception of the one life that was lost. We can rebuild. We can replace. But it is still the temporary stuff of this world. That is why the stuff of this world cannot be our treasure. That cannot be where our heart is.

Flip over to Matthew 7. This is still part of the same sermon that Jesus is preaching, but at the end in verse 24 He says:

**“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not**

**fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against the house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”** (Matthew 7:24-27)

At the end of Jesus' sermon He says, “If you listen to what I have to say, you are wise. If you don't, you are a fool.” You can almost picture Jesus standing at these sites where these homes have been destroyed and saying, “Just remember, I told you this stuff won't last.” There are some people whose whole lives were poured into these homes and they are gone. There are other people who understood that this is just earthly stuff and what we live for are the things of eternity.

Tuesday afternoon I went to visit Celia Rice in the hospital. When I walked in the door I said, “How are you? How is your house? How is your life?” Without missing a beat she said, “My life is great; my home is destroyed.” I thought, *You've got it!* Bob and Celia Rice have lived their lives for the things of eternity. That has been the passion of their lives. I don't want to minimize their loss. What these people have been through is very traumatic; it is devastating. But they understand that while it is devastating to lose their home, they also understand that of the things that will last forever, they lost nothing. When our treasure is in heaven, neither tornado nor anything else can take it away. That is why we don't live for the things of this earth.

One of the things I like about the people of Nebraska is that we are a tough people. We are a persevering people. Nobody is going to roll over and die. They are going to rebuild. They are going to replace. They will emerge out of the rubble, because that is who we are. But in the process of doing that, it is very important that we remember what we are rebuilding and replacing still won't last. It will come and it will go, so that cannot be the focus of our lives. The focus of our lives has to be the things that last forever.

That brings us to what I intended to talk about today, and that is what our mission really is as the Church. We are not about buildings. We are not about being some sort of a religious social organization. We are really about people and remembering that ultimately what lasts forever are people. People will last forever, either in paradise with Jesus Christ or in eternal punishment separated from Jesus Christ.

I talked to a lot of families that went through these tornadoes. One of the things you hear consistently is, “At least we are okay.” They understand that they can rebuild the house; they can replace the stuff. But human life is sacred. What comes with that is the reminder that is why we don't live for stuff. That is why we live to take this message to people—because people are eternal.

Turn a little further in Matthew to chapter 28. This is Memorial weekend, and Memorial Day is a time to remember. It is a time to remember those who have sacrificed that we might have our freedoms. It is very important for us to remember those sacrifices. It is a time for us to remember. Communion is also a memorial. Communion is a time to remember. Jesus said, “Remember this and be about My mission until I come back.”

**But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to**

**observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** (Matthew 28: 16-20)

These are the marching orders for the Church. Here at LBC we take our mission statement out of Colossians 1, in the words of Paul, when he says his purpose in life is to seek to present every person complete in Christ. It is a different way of saying exactly the same thing. In the end, our mission in life is to go and make disciples—to reach lost ones and build them up in their faith that they might become complete like Christ.

It is interesting in this text that the verb is not *go*. The verb is actually *make* disciples. You could translate this: “While going, make disciples.” In other words, the assumption is that everybody is going to go. You go out into the marketplace. You go into your neighborhoods. You go; but while going, you have one ultimate mission—and that is to make disciples. There is nothing in any of our lives more important than that. It is of eternal consequence because people matter.

I would just like to remind us of some of the things that we are doing as a church body that are an expression of our commitment to accomplish the Great Commission. Jesus was asked once, “What is the greatest commandment?” He said, “The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. And the second is like it. It is to love your neighbor as yourself.” Someone asked Him, “Who is my neighbor?” And Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, which boiled down to saying that my neighbor is anybody that needs my help. One of the ways we proclaim the gospel is by loving our neighbors and helping people that need help.

One of the great things to see this past week was how our body responded to the storm devastation. There are many of you who have committed many hours this week to helping people you don’t even know. This is one of the ways that we proclaim the gospel, and it is very important. Those of you know who you are and you need to be affirmed that you were right on track. That is who we are as a church. It is a very important expression of our commitment to God to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Sometimes preaching the gospel means you stand in a heap of rubble and you begin to pick it up and throw it away as part of our commitment to one another. Just so you know what we have done, by Monday late afternoon or evening we had gathered together cash to distribute to a lot of these families to buy the essentials of life and survive until insurance kicks in. To date, probably around \$10,000 in cash has been handed out—mostly to church families, but not exclusively. Some families have just needed some help.

You will notice on the Hot Sheet an item that talks about our benevolent fund. We had already planned on putting that information in the bulletin this weekend—before the disaster hit. Almost \$22,000 since January has been distributed to people within our body who have needed some help for a variety of reasons. That does not include the money that has gone out to the tornado victims. Basically we have exhausted our fund. One of the things that you could do, if you feel God leading you, is to help replenish the fund. We basically gave in faith on Monday, believing that when we gathered this weekend and made the need known, that people would respond to that. We gave that money out and we need to replenish the benevolent fund. If you would prayerfully consider that, you can make a gift on your way out. The ushers will be at the door. You can also mail it in or you can bring it next week. That is a very tangible thing that we need to do so that we can continue to help people. The response to this has been a very significant outreach of the church, and it has been a great week that way.

One of the other expressions of our commitment to fulfill the mission has been cultivated over the last several years, as we talked about our ineffectiveness of reaching people in north Lincoln. Out of that has come a belief that God wants us to hive off several hundred people and start a church in north Lincoln. I want to talk about that a little bit. The name of the church will be North Pointe Community Church. Some of you may ask, “Why does it not have the name Berean in there?” The answer is because “Berean” is a weird word. It causes us all kinds of confusion. People sometimes don’t know what to think about us because Berean is such a strange term. A lot of people think we are some sort of a weird cult. If we were Southeast Community Church, nobody would even ask that question. But “Berean” creates a certain suspicion in people’s minds, and many of our Berean churches don’t have the name Berean in it for that reason. I think it is a good move not to put it in this church planting. Curt Lehman, who was the founding pastor, often talked about whether we should change the name. We are just too far along now to do it here, but the North Pointe Community Church will be a Berean church. It will have our purpose and our core values. It will have unique ministries related to north Lincoln.

Andy McFarlane is the pastor whom God has raised up to lead this. If you don’t know Andy, he will lead us in Communion a little bit later, and he is going to be preaching next week. I would encourage you to get to know Andy. On June 13<sup>th</sup> there will be a picnic at Bethany Park for people who are interested in knowing more about the new church. If you are going to attend that, you do need to sign up so they know how many people are coming.

Over the years that we have talked about this church plant, people have been very excited about it. We are moving now to a point where it has got to be more than just excitement. Now it is moving to actually *doing something* and *making a commitment*. It is realizing that you are going to leave something that is very established for something that is going to be very hard. There are some people who are thinking, *I will go to the north church because it will be more convenient*. If that is what you are thinking, you need to stay here—because it will not be more convenient. It will be much less convenient. It is going to be hard. This is a brand new work. It is going to take sacrifice. It is going to cost you something. But if your passion is to see people in north Lincoln reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ so they can spend eternity in paradise instead of punishment, then you need to prayerfully consider going—because that is what this is all about. It isn’t about trying to make church more convenient for anybody. It is trying to reach people in the north part of our city.

One of the reasons we have been so effective in responding to what happened last weekend is because we are connected to south Lincoln and to south Lancaster County. This is our community. This is our family. We need to be that connected to north Lincoln, and the only way to do that is to have a church there. I would encourage people to begin praying about whether or not God would have you to go. But just know: it is going to cost you. It will be hard, and it will also be very *rewarding*, as we see a new church begin in north Lincoln.

Another way that we have tried to be consistent with our purpose began several years ago, as God laid a vision on the heart of Brad and Carma Bryan to go into Lincoln’s inner city and begin to reach children with the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of the realities of our city is that most of the evangelical churches are out here on the edge of town, and the inner city is very neglected. So God raised up a ministry called City Impact. For a while it was a ministry of Lincoln Berean Church. Over time it has become its own organization, but it is very connected still to Lincoln Berean. Many of our people serve there. We help support it financially, and we still think of it as a part of Lincoln Berean Church. This morning I want to invite Brad Bryan, the executive director, to share what God is doing through the ministry of City Impact.

## **Brad Bryan:**

What were you doing the summer of 1993? I want to take you back to what God was doing in my life that summer, as I began a corporate job here in Lincoln. The Berean college ministry had gone out to Los Angeles to work with an inner city ministry called World Impact. They began to serve there. I was unable to go on that trip because I was not able to leave my job for the seven weeks. But through a Bible study here at Lincoln Berean, there was a young lady who asked if there was someone who would be willing to go spend time with a family. The father had left to go back to Nigeria and had left the mother here with five kids. So I offered to go down and spend time there. There began the journey! I would like you to go on a “journey” with me over the next couple of minutes to see how City Impact is affecting our community today.

As I began, I volunteered to spend time with these families that summer after the team had returned from L.A. We just began to establish relationships with the kids and the families that summer of 1993. Then we held our first Bible club in November 1993. My wife Carma and I were married in October 1994. It was not long after that, that Berean began to support us as a local missions outreach to that community. Many from here and the HEA class began to serve snacks. We began to see the Bible club grow from about 10 to 60. We began to see more and more people congregate outside Christ Temple Mission Church. Melissa Moates began to lead praise and worship out there on those steps as we began to grow, and it was exciting to see all that God was doing. My wife and I then moved down to this neighborhood, right across the street from the housing project that we began in. We left our corporate jobs and began City Impact full-time in January 1997. Through this time, we began to see many volunteers from this church, like Donna Williams, help us grow our mentoring Bible clubs that are held at Central Alliance Church at 29<sup>th</sup> and O Street. We now have over 100 kids that come weekly to Bible club, and we are able to share the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

We began to see that many of these kids were reading on a much lower level than what we anticipated when we began to work with them. So we began to do tutoring and mentoring with them after school on a weekly basis, and we have been blessed by seeing how that is going to impact their lives in the future.

In the summer many of the children are unattended, so we are hosting “Super Summer in the City” for City Impact. Many of them get to go to camps such as Kids Across America down near Branson, Missouri for a week or an overnight sports camp. They get to experience many things that they never experience here in Lincoln, Nebraska. We also have an 8-week summer day program, where these kids are able to come all week long for eight weeks to be nurtured with three meals every day, to hear about the love and hope of Jesus Christ, and to be tutored. We also do community outreach throughout the year. One of the ways we do that is through our community picnic. Hundreds of families and kids come, and we serve a meal and we get to serve with them.

Many of you from Lincoln Berean are familiar with “Gifts of Love” Christmas store. This is one of our major outreaches throughout the year. We are able to reach out and restore dignity back to the families of Lincoln’s low-income neighborhoods by marking down gifts 70 to 80% off the retail price. They can come and shop and provide gifts for their own family. We really feel that this is a way we can reach them with the hope and love of Jesus Christ. We also hand out Jesus videos and free Bibles during this time. We have seen over 450 volunteers work with us over this past year to make this event possible. Some of the comments we have heard about our Christmas

store include:

“This was just an awesome experience to be able to walk through the store and be able to help someone who doesn’t have a lot. It helps them get gifts so that they don’t have to experience what I experienced as a child.”

“The people here really have the gift of love that they are talking about.”

We also began an outreach to the kids, where kids are able to shop for gifts for their own families. Over 100 kids last year got to shop for their families at this Christmas store.

We are seeing lives changed and transformed through our praise and worship and Bible clubs on a weekly basis. Our women’s Bible study has grown to over 16 women, and lives are being transformed through that, as well as a couple’s Bible study. We are also seeing high school graduates this year go to college for the first time in their family’s history. Families are being changed from the inside out with the good news of God’s love. If you would like to learn more about City Impact, one great way is our new website at: [www.cityimpact.org](http://www.cityimpact.org). We are so excited to see what God is going to do in the future years through City Impact, as we continue to reach out socially, educationally, and spiritually to Lincoln’s low-income neighborhoods.

Lastly, we are getting ready to reach out and start a new endeavor that Bryan Clark is going to share with you now.

### **Bryan Clark:**

Last January I encouraged you to prayerfully consider laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven. I shared with you a couple of weeks ago that many have responded to that. Our general fund giving is up about 25%. You need to know that when you support the ministry of Lincoln Berean Church, part of every dollar goes to support City Impact. So you have been a part of what is happening there, and you are investing in things that are eternal.

Several years ago Brad and I were talking about City Impact and we were looking at what God was doing. Some of these young people come up through the high school ranks and they become young adults. The question becomes, “What then?” We started to look at the families that were reached for Christ, and it became obvious we needed to provide a church for them. It is not realistic to think they are going to come all the way out here on the edge of town. They need a church that is in their community, in their neighborhood, that they can walk to. They need their own worshiping body there. So we began to talk about that and how that might come to pass.

At the same time, through the last many years there have been eight of us senior pastors of evangelical churches in town who meet together monthly. We have become friends and really are committed to each other. We began to talk about the idea that maybe we are the churches that God wants to use to plant churches in the inner city. As we talked about that, there were six of us who believed God was calling us to that: Jerry David of Lincoln City Church, Stu Kerns of Zion, Mark Brunot of First Evangelical Free, Tom Remple of Faith Bible, Tim Johnson of New Covenant, and myself. It is quite a range of different churches coming together because we have a passion for the Great Commission. We are all a part of the greater Church of Jesus Christ. These men are not just fellow pastors; they are my friends. I would do anything in my power to help their church grow, and they would do anything to help me. We have a great commitment to one another. We prayed about it and we determined that God wanted us to be the agent to plant these churches in the inner city, so we have become kind of a mini-denomination within the city. We are providing leadership and we are providing funding, making it possible for these church

plants in the inner city to take place. We have done a fair amount of research, and to date, we are not aware of any other city in the United States that has ever done this. We have multiple churches of different denominations that are coming together to plant churches in the city. We really believe God is leading us to do this.

Over the last few weeks one of the very exciting developments has been that God has led us to someone we have called to be the church plant pastor of the first inner city church, and that is Evan Brown. At this time I am going to introduce you to Evan and his wife Te Anna. They can tell you a little bit about themselves and about their vision for this church in our inner city.

**Evan Brown:**

Thank you, Pastor. Good morning! We are the Browns and we recently moved here from Atlanta, Georgia, where we have lived for six years. This is my wife Te Anna; we have been married six years in September. We have 3.25 kids: Chayah who is four; Andrew is three; Micah is 15 months; and we are 4 months pregnant.

We are so glad to be here. I will tell you a little bit of history about our ministry background. We were on staff for Campus Crusade for Christ; I joined the staff of Crusade back in 1991. I am from California, so I served at the University of California in Berkley, and my wife came on staff in 1997. After we were married, we went down to Atlanta to work on the campuses of Spelman, Morehouse, Clark-Atlanta, and Morris Brown. Then we switched our campus ministry to family ministry where we worked with Urban Family Ministry in Atlanta. You may be familiar with Family Life Ministry and Dennis Rainey on the radio program. That is a variation of that ministry to inner city churches across America.

Our vision for this urban church plant is rooted in our ministry background. You saw in the video the many brown faces and the white faces. If you know that part of Lincoln where we are going to go in—the downtown area—there are also Hispanic, Asian and Middle Eastern people. We want to reach all of them, because we know that Christ has destroyed the partition that separated us. Because of His blood we are now united in Him.

Our vision is really founded in the verse the Lord has given me to focus on in John 15:5. Jesus is saying: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.” Abiding is the practice of spending time in God’s presence, and in that time letting Him reveal Himself for who He is, and not for what we suppose Him to be. That is going to be our focus in teaching, preaching, and worshiping with the people in that area of town.

We are excited to be here! We have some friends who have lived here in Lincoln about four years. We joked with them while we were in Atlanta. I would call up here in January and ask what the temperature was. They would say it was about zero degrees. I would say, “It is about 70 degrees down here.” And now look where we are! I bet the Lord was saying, “I am going to send you there.” We welcome your prayers, your input, and your involvement in whatever way that may become possible. Just pray for us as we seek to do the Lord’s will here in Lincoln.

**Bryan Clark:**

Again, you need to know that every time you put a dollar in the offering for the general fund, part of that is going for Evan, Te Anna and that inner city work. These are just expressions of our commitment to present every person complete in Christ. Whether it is loving your neighbor and helping in a disaster, or planting a church in north Lincoln or in the inner city, what we all need to

think about is how we are involved in accomplishing the Great Commission. I want to bring it down to a personal level just before we go into Communion.

I would like to invite each of us to think about what we are doing to accomplish the Great Commission. We have this incredible message—this message of grace that is the difference between eternal paradise and eternal punishment. Our marching orders are to share this with anybody that will listen in the market place, in our neighborhoods, in our families. Sometimes it is easy to get distracted doing other things. One of the things we have to come back to is that there is nothing more important than this. This is what we are all about. This is why we exist.

Let me ask you a question: What are *you* doing? Through your personality, through your giftedness, you are all going to be different. But in what way are you involved in accomplishing the Great Commission? When was the last time you had an unbeliever in your home for dinner? Can you name three unbelievers in your life that you are intentionally building relationships with to introduce them to Christ? Who was the last person you actually shared the gospel with? When was the last time you invited an unbeliever to church? Statistics show that an overwhelming majority of people, if invited, would come to church. Each of us needs to think about what we are doing. Hopefully we are not just out there making a living, but we are understanding the mission is to take the gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere we go—to make an eternal difference in people's lives.

As we enter into Communion, this is a reminder of what Jesus did for us. But He also said, “Do this until I come back.” It is the Great Commission: while you are making disciples you are to remember. In this quiet time of Communion, I want to invite us quietly before God to search our own hearts and our own lives and ask ourselves, *What are we doing, through our own personalities and our own gifts, to reach the people in our network of relationships?*

\* Scripture quotations are from the NASB (New American Standard) translation.

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