

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

by Ron Harvey

We are Grace Baptist Church. We are a local church meeting here in Bartlett, Tennessee. We are a small church of about 30 to 40 families. But we are a church.

There are various images in the Bible to illustrate the church. The church is called a body, a bride, and family, a flock, a community and an army. And all of those images teach us about the church.

We have examples of local churches in the New Testament. We have the Jerusalem church and the church at Antioch and the various churches that Paul founded on his missionary journeys. And we can study those various churches to try to understand what a church is to be and what a church is to do.

We also have statements of Jesus which teach us things about the church. Jesus said, "I will build my church." And he has been building it ever since.

Obviously, the church is to be a growing organism. Christ said, "I will build it." That is, he will build it brick by brick until it is complete.

Most of us have been going to church for many years and we have some idea what a church is, but perhaps we are a little fuzzy as to what the various purposes of the church are. And maybe that's because we haven't given enough effort to discovering what our purposes are.

Example: You know, if you set out to go on a trip somewhere, oftentimes everyone is all excited. And everyone hustles around and they get packed the night before and they wake up the next morning and get dressed and your wife takes 3 hours to get ready and the kids are impatient and finally the whole family gets in the car and you back out of the driveway and someone asks, "Where are we going Dad?" And you say, "I don't know."

Now that would be silly. It's impossible to go somewhere if you don't know where you are going. There has to be a starting point and there has to be a destination. And if you know those two points, then you can plug into a GPS system and off you go in the right direction and confident that you will get there.

But sometimes I think we as a church don't have a good grasp on where we want to go. Perhaps we know where we are, but we are not sure where we are going. And so, we don't really go anywhere. We sort of walk in place and we maintain the status quo. But it seems to me that Jesus said, "*I will build my church.*" And that implies a moving church, a dynamic church and a growing church.

You see, if you are building something, it looks different on day two than it did on day one. And on day 10 it is starting to look different indeed. Certainly it looks more complete.

And Jesus said, "*I will build my church.*"

In the next few weeks and months I want us to begin to think about where we are going. What is the image you have for Grace Baptist Church in your wildest dreams? Do you picture us with thousands of members like Bellevue Baptist? Or do you picture us always having a few families. It certainly is enjoyable to have an intimate body of believers. We don't have to be big to have church.

Do you picture us winning people to Christ, or do you picture us sort of remaining in a little cocoon and focusing on our own personal growth and edification?

I have a feeling about this church. I can't really explain it. But I have a good feeling about it. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I know our doctrine is good. Now that is foundational. I would rather have a church of 30 families with good doctrine than 300 families with bad doctrine. Because with good doctrine, Jesus can build a great church.

Maybe I have a good feeling about this church because we have a core of solid and godly men. I didn't say perfect, but I did say solid and godly. And where would we be without this handful of men who are willing to take responsibility and are willing to watch out for us.

Maybe I have a good feeling about this church because there are wonderful women who work behind the scenes and who also care about this church.

Maybe I have a good feeling about this church because I've seen the Lord's hand in virtually giving us this building and allowing us to easily sell our other building.

Maybe I have a good feeling about this church because we have shown a little vision and are stepping out in faith by building on to our present sanctuary.

I think mostly, I have a good feeling about this church because I have a good feeling about each and every one of you. I have a good feeling about our church body. I look one way and I have a good feeling about the eyes of the body. And then I look the other way and there are the ears. And then I look over here and I have a good feeling about the hands and the feet.

But I get the sense that we are not complete by any means. But we are comforted because Jesus said, *I will build my church.*

And you know what? I have a good feeling about Jesus. I have a real good feeling about him. And if he says, *I will build my church*, I think all we have to do is believe him and be faithful. And then, we watch him build.

Example: I just had a roof put on my house. And we bought the materials and hired the roofers and once we had done our part, Sonya and I just had fun walking out on the back patio and watching them work. They were fabulous workers. They virtually finished our roof in one day.

Let me say this. Jesus is a fabulous church builder. He has great credentials. And he has years and years of experience. And I am confident, if we do things his way, he will build his church and he will build it quickly.

I want to speak to you this morning on the purposes of the church. This list is certainly not exhaustive and I can't possibly cover them in detail in one 30 minute message. But I would like to touch on them. And I would like for us as a church body to begin mapping out a destination based on these biblical purposes of the church. And once we know where we would like to go, then we can begin to develop plans on how to get there.

Now let me say that in outlining the various purposes of Christ's church, there is an overriding purpose that supercedes all other purposes. And this is true not only for our **church**, but also for us as **individuals** as well.

The greatest purpose of an individual or of a church is to glorify God.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

I Cor. 10:31

If there is such a thing, this is the answer to the question of life. This is what it is all about. Whether we are talking about an individual or a church, our actions are guided by that one, grand principle,

Do all to the glory of God.

Now there are a couple of things that I want to say about that. First,

- **That principle is an absolute.** We will never go wrong if we act so as to bring glory to God.

This is the highest end ever to be attained. No other goal supercedes this goal. God's glory is never sacrificed for any reason.

And that means, God's glory is never sacrificed for man's happiness and welfare. And this runs counter to much preaching and teaching that you will hear today. You see, much preaching today is man-centered rather than God-centered as though the Scriptures say, "Do all to the glory of man." No.

Do all to the glory of God.

If it comes down to a competition between the glory of God and the happiness of man, the happiness of man shall be sacrificed every time.

This explains why sometimes bad things happen to God's people. It's because ultimately, the thing to be served is not the happiness of man but the glory of God.

Just ask the man born blind in John 9. He was blind all his life until Jesus came along and healed him. And Jesus disciples asked Jesus, "Why was this man born blind?"

Jesus told them, "So the works of God would be made manifest."

You mean, this man lived in darkness for decades just so God would be glorified when Jesus healed him? Yes.

This illustrates that the glory of God is absolute. And, it is our duty to seek it, to submit to it when necessary, and to glory in it ourselves.

And when we understand that this world is unfolding, not primarily for our benefit, but for the promotion of the glory of God, then we can understand what Paul meant when he said,

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content – whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.

Phil. 4:11-13

- **That principle is absolutely just and right.**

God is not a selfish ogre for ordering this universe so that it brings glory to himself. He is the One to whom all glory is due. Glory is rightfully ascribed to Him. It is right and just and good to give God the glory. And it is wrong to take it from Him.

But, other than the general principle of seeking to glorify God in all that we do, what are the purposes of the church? What are we to be doing in order to glorify God in our church?

- I. We are to be engaging in worship.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind
Matthew 22:37-40

The church exists to worship God. Any church can do this. It doesn't matter whether our church is small, medium or large. We meet together to worship Him.

Jesus said,

Where two or three are gathered together in his name, there I am in the midst of them.

And Jesus said,

“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”
Matthew 4:10

And so, the first great purpose of the local church is to worship God.

Notice that when it says, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,” notice that worship comes first. Worship then serve.

My feeling is that God prefers worship even to other types of good service.

What is our obligation with regard to worship:

- A. Come with a worshipful attitude
 - a. Come as though he is your God and you are his subject
 - b. Come loving Him

Example: You know, when we take a trip to see someone we love, we go so joyfully, don't we.

And how much more joyfully should we come to meet with Jesus who has the scars in his hands and feet to prove how much he loves us.

- c. Come with an attitude of confession (of sin)

- B. Come singing.

The Bible says, "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.*"

Now it says make a noise, and I have heard some of you sing, and you are quite biblical.

- C. Come praying.

Prayer is a sweet form of worship. One of the sweetest forms of worship.

Example: Brother Mark has taught us that the aroma of sweet incense that was burned in the tabernacle was a picture of the prayers of the saints.

You see, it just smells good to God. As weak and as stumbling as our prayers are, they are a sweet savor unto God.

- 4. Come to hear preaching.

There are all kinds of preachers - some halting, some fluent; some are rather inarticulate, some eloquent. But one thing preaching must always be – it must always be, "Thus sayeth the Lord."

It can never be thus sayeth the preacher. And it should not be, "I think this and I think that." But after much study and much thought and after careful consideration of all the Word of God, the preacher stands in the pulpit and says, "Thus sayeth the Lord."

And I believe with all my heart that people will come from miles away to hear what the Lord says. And I believe they will come from this community to our church to hear what the Lord says. And when you come to hear what the Lord says, that is perhaps the highest form of worship – to hear and gladly receive true preaching of the Word of God.

II. We are to engage in ministry.

Love thy neighbor as thyself.

Matthew 22:39

This is one of the purposes of the church: to minister to the needs of people in the name of Jesus.

- A. We are to minister to all kinds of needs.
 - 1. Physical needs
 - 2. Spiritual needs
- B. The saints are the ministers. (Eph.4:12)
- C. The pastors and teachers are to equip the saints for ministry.

Now there are lots of ministry opportunities out there. There are many good works to be done, many good deeds to perform. Jesus said even when you give someone a cup of water in his name, it is a ministry, and you will be rewarded.

So, the first two purposes of the church are to worship and to minister.

III. We are to engage in evangelism.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 28:19

One of the great purposes of the church is to evangelize the world.

God has given us a little corner of that world. And I think he expanded our little corner when he moved us into this community. And one of our purposes is to reach people for Christ.

There is no doubt that there are many un-churched people right here around us. And among those that are un-churched there are some sheep. And among those sheep, there are some that we might lead to the Shepherd.

Now I want you to know that evangelism is our **duty** and also our great **privilege**. And we need to be about the work of making disciples.

Example: When I was younger, I used to think that church was a place only for believers and that we should not bring unbelievers into church. But now, I realize that God has ordained the foolishness of preaching to save many. And it is important to open our doors and invite inquisitive unbelievers in to hear the preaching of the gospel.

The gospel is powerful unto the saving of souls.

If we will bring them in, God's Word will do a work.

Listen to what Isaiah said about God's Word.

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.
Isaiah 55:11

Do you believe in the power of the Word of God? I do. With my whole heart I believe in the power of the Word of God. We can't manipulate people into the kingdom. But, the Word can draw them in. And true evangelism is one of the great purposes of the church. If evangelism is not the work of the church, then whose work is it?

IV. We are to engage in family time (Fellowship)

The book of Acts teaches us that the early church came together on the first day of the week to break bread. And they brought their offerings and they worshipped together.

And one of the most wonderful purposes of the church is to have family time together because there is no one in this world who loves you like your family. Your next door neighbor may like you a lot, but he doesn't love you like your mother or like your brother.

And the amazing thing about being in a true church is that you are a member of a spiritual family. Do you know that in many ways, you become closer to your church family than you are to your blood family?

Jesus said,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 28:19

One of the essential meanings of baptism is identification with Christ. But, it is also identification with Christ's people. You have become a part of a family. And church is the place where the family comes together to see one another. You see, we belong to Christ and we belong to one another.

The Bible is very clear that we are each members of the body. One is a hand another is a foot. One is an eye and another is an ear. But we need one another for our general welfare.

Have you ever noticed how comfortable it is to be among other believers. They are brothers and sisters, mommas and daddys.

And fellowship is an essential purpose of the church.

And last,

V. We are to engage in discipleship.

Helping people become more like Christ.

Paul said,

We preach Christ, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Col. 1:28

And he gave some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry.

Eph.4:12

We are not only to reach people, we are to teach people so they can be more like Jesus every day.

Worship
Minister
Evangelize
Fellowship
Discipleship