

Back to the Basics

Sharing Our Faith

John 3:3 (NIV)

³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Prayer

Let's read where Jesus and His disciples are working to reach others and tell them about the Kingdom of God.

John 3:22 ²²After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.

As one can see, Jesus is about spending time with those who know Him, those who don't know Him and in reaching the lost with the truth of the Gospel. Let's look at a classic illustration.

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought for their safety went out day and night, tirelessly rescuing the lost. This wonderful little lifesaving station saved many lives. So it became famous.

Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and crews were trained and the little life station grew.

Some of the members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a more comfortable place should be provided, as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots and beds and put better furniture in the large building.

Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as sort of a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions so they hired lifeboat crews to do the work. The lifesaving design still prevailed in the club's decorations and there was a lifeboat in the room where club initiations were held. And about this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So, the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership and most of the members wanted to stop the lifesaving activity because they were a hindrance and unpleasant to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out they were still a lifesaving station after all. They were finally voted down and told if

they wanted to save the lives of various kinds of people shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast...which they did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that occurred in the old. It evolved into a club and another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself and if we visit that coast today, we'll find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore, shipwrecks are still frequent but most of the people drown.

It's easy for the church, isn't it, to lose sight of what it is...so easy. Let's look at the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This is a passage that we must understand. In fact, every person in the church around the world should hear the truth of this passage. Our Lord has so much to say and so many people apparently do not understand the mission of the church. For many of the people who don't understand the mission of the church, there isn't even a thought along that line. They don't even give a consideration to what the mission of the church might be. They seemingly show up whenever it is convenient or even frequently to enjoy all that is provided for them, to take whatever they feel like taking, to leave whatever they feel like leaving. They seem to want to be involved in the church to the degree that it serves or meets particular needs in their own lives. And it somehow escapes both their understanding and even their curiosity as to what the mission of the church really is, much less are they wholeheartedly dedicated to the fulfillment of that mission.

Now if we were to survey people in the church, and ask them what they felt the primary purpose of the church was, we might get some answers like this:

Some might suggest to us that the purpose of the church is fellowship. That the church is a place to make friends with good people, honest people, godly people who strengthen your life. It's a place to provide activity for the family, enjoyable activity, meaningful activity. It's a place to enjoy music, the best of music, recreation, to cultivate relationships. It's sort of a place to hang out at until the Rapture. It's a place where love is cultivated and shared.

And all of that is certainly important because Jesus Himself said:

John 13:35 (NIV)

³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

But one step higher than that attitude would be the attitude of those who suggest that the mission of the church is teaching, that the primary objective of the church is to put out doctrine, to strengthen believers, to articulate theology, to give principles for practical Christian living, to train people for various responsibilities in the church, to instruct children and young people in obedience to the law of God with an objective of bringing them to maturity in Christ. And that certainly is a very important part of the church's ministry because ...

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

But even a step higher than that would be those people who suggest to us that the real purpose of the church is praise to God. The church is really a praising community, a community of people who exalt God for who He is and what He has done. And obviously they suggest to us that this is the central activity of heaven and that is praise and adoration and honor and reverence and awe and homage being given eternally by all the saints redeemed and all the angels who are holy forever and ever and ever. Therefore if that's the primary responsibility of those in heaven, it certainly must be the primary responsibility of those on earth. In Revelation 4 and 5, we find that heaven is occupied with praise.

Now the fact is that fellowship is an absolute essential in the church. And teaching is equally essential and so is praise. But none of them and not all of them in combination are the mission of the church or the purpose of the church or the goal of the church or the objective of the church. None of them is why we are here. None of them.

You say, "Well then, what is the mission of the church?" Well, we have to start, first of all, with what is the motive of the church? The answer to that is very simple. We are to be for the glory of God, is that not true? We have known that through the years that the primary greatest single unified motive of the church is the glory of God.

Ephesians 1:12 (NIV)

¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

All Christians are to give God the glory!

Ephesians 3:21 (NIV)

²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The primary motive of the church is to glorify God. Jesus even came into the world for that purpose and gave us an example. He came to show us the Father's glory. He came to reveal the glory of the Father.

John 1:14 (NIV)

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only [Or, *the Only Begotten*], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus Christ was the express image, the glory of God manifest.

Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)

³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

So, Christ came into the world with one motive, basically, and that was to glorify God. And that motive has been passed on to the church. We are to give God glory and this is our reason for being.

But what about a mission? What is the mission that flows out of that motive? Now the answer will become clear as we take a look at redemptive history. When man fell in sin in the garden, because of man's fall, the entire human race was condemned to death in hell. The whole human race died, in a sense, in the sin of Adam. But immediately, God set out to redeem man back to Himself out of gracious love.

Genesis 3:9 (NIV)

⁹But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Romans 3:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

And if we remember the story, we will remember that when Adam fell in sin, and was very much aware of his sinfulness, and his alienation from God, he did not roam around the garden saying, "God, where are You? God, where are You?" It was God in Genesis 3:9 who came into the garden.

Revelation 22:17 (NIV)

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

From the first invitation to the last invitation of Scripture, and all in between, God is a God who longs to redeem fallen man to Himself.

God has been and God continues and will continue to seek to redeem people and ultimately to redeem the whole fallen world for the purpose of giving Him glory. It glorifies God when sinners are saved. It glorifies God when the unredeemed and separated from Him are brought back by grace into fellowship and transformed and made into members of His family.

So important is this on God's heart that it even tells us in Scripture that He was in the world, reconciling the world to Himself.

God became a man. God invaded human history. God came into our world to do this that was the desire of His heart. And why was it His desire? Because God's supreme desire is to glorify Himself as the absolutely perfect God, He has an absolutely perfect right and an absolutely perfect reason to glorify Himself. The way in which He seeks to glorify Himself is to redeem sinful men. That is the single greatest act of holy God.

Genesis 12:3 (NIV)

³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**"

From the very beginning, God wanted to redeem all the families of the earth. It was never His intention to select and isolate Israel as if they were the only people that He cared about. Israel was never to be the only redeemed people; they were merely to be the missionary people to reach the world.

Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

He says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

In other words, every time we bring someone to Christ, we add another voice to the hallelujah chorus. We have another person who can now be to the praise of His glory.

So the motive, then, is to glorify God. And the mission that does that is to win men and women to the Savior. And as they come to know Him and their sins are forgiven, and they are transformed from death to life and darkness to light, God is glorified in the miracle of that transformation. The glory of God is manifest in His loving desire and in His power to redeem lost men out of the world. So God loves the world and thus seeks the world to Himself and to accomplish that, He sacrificed Himself. He paid the ultimate supreme price to do what He desired to do to fulfill His glory.

Now here's the point. **The person who desires to glorify God, who wants to honor God's will and God's purpose and God's desire, must then love the lost world the way God loves the lost world and give his life for the sake of winning that lost world.** That is the pattern. God loved a lost world and sought to win it to Himself for His own glory. Christ came into the world, loved a lost world and sought to win it to Himself for the Father's glory. We are sent into the world to love the lost world, to seek to win the lost world for the glory of God the Father. Our mission is the same mission Christ had, it's the same mission God the Father had...no different...identical.

John 17:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ **As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.**

Underline the word "as." That is the dominant idea here that conveys the intent. "**As you sent me.**" Well, why did He send You? "To glorify Himself through winning lost men and women to salvation." "As You have sent Me into the world, the unredeemed world to win men and women, even so have I also sent them into the world." It's the same thing.

We have no different mission in the world than Jesus Christ had to fulfill the heart of God in winning the lost. That is our mission...to glorify God by bringing salvation to lost men and women. What then is the church to be doing? What then is the church's mission, objective goal and priority?

Is it fellowship? If God wanted us just to exist for fellowship, we ought to be saved and taken instantly to heaven where fellowship is perfect, where there is nothing to violate fellowship, and nothing to break fellowship and everything to stimulate fellowship, and perfect harmony, and perfect order, and perfect love, and perfect communion and perfect communication. No, if fellowship was our purpose, God would have taken us to heaven.

Teaching? If our purpose is that we may know doctrine and know knowledge, the best thing God could do is take us immediately to heaven where we would know as we are known instantaneously and all teaching ceases because everybody knows everything they need to know. No. If the purpose of the church was teaching, we'd be gone.

Well, what about praise? If God wanted perfect praise out of His church, He'd take them to heaven, too, because that's where perfect praise occurs. Our praise here is muddled up, just like our teaching is. If all God wanted was fellowship, then let's get to heaven and have perfect fellowship. If all God wants is that we have understanding and knowledge of His Word, then

let's get to heaven and get perfect knowledge and not have to listen to a whole lot of teachers and try to figure out who's right. If all God wants out of us is praise, then let's get up there with the angelic chorus and the redeemed of the ages and let's get on with our eternal praise.

The point is this, there is only one reason we are here and one reason alone.

Luke 19:10 (NIV)

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

It is as the Father sent the Son that the Son sends us. If the Father wanted fellowship with the Son, He would have kept Him in heaven. If the Father wanted perfect knowledge with the Son, He would have kept Him in heaven. If the Father wanted the perfect praise that was His, He would have kept Him in heaven. He wouldn't need to send Him to earth. But if the Father wanted to redeem fallen men, He had to send Him to this earth. That's the only reason we're here. There is no other reason.

So when we evaluate our Christian commitment and we evaluate how we're using our Christian life, we need to ask ourselves one question: am I involved in winning lost men and women to Jesus Christ? Is that where my time and energy and effort and talent and money is going? Do we do that? That's the only reason you're here.

And if frankly we're not doing that, we really might as well go to heaven. If the church means for you just a place for fellowship, we would be better off in heaven. If all we want is to come and soak up information, we ought to go to heaven and we wouldn't have to bother with the effort, we'd have the information instantaneously. If all we want to do is sing nice songs and praise the Lord, that's fine, but we'd be better off in heaven because it's absolutely perfect praise. So unless we're committed to the fact that we are here for the responsibility of winning a lost world to Jesus Christ, then we better reexamine why we exist.

Fellowship, teaching, praise are not the mission of the church. They're part of the preparation and the training for the mission. I mean, a great athlete does a lot of things in training, but the training is not to be confused with the competing and the winning. It is not to be confused with running the race. All the exercise and preparation we go through in your education is not to be confused with succeeding in our profession. And when the church meets for fellowship, teaching and praise, all that is only preparation for the running of the race and winning of lost people to Christ. That's why we're here, that is it.

We thank God for fellowship, for teaching, for praise. But that's not our goal. There are so many opportunities to reach a lost world and there are so many lost in the world, so many small groups of people in remote corners, so many large nations that are lost, so many people across our country that are unreached and we stand in tremendous capability at this church to reach a world for Christ that we are constrained by the lack of commitment of so many people.

We are bogged down. We are preoccupied with the silly, frivolous and stupid things of this life. We are bogged down in trivialities and junk and useless trivia of the world while people near and far do not know the saving message that is the only reason we're even around. Otherwise we might as well be in heaven. People are preoccupied with that which is absolutely useless. Their time, their thoughts, their energies, their money goes for all the junk imaginable.

There are people who will spend thousands of dollars to travel half way around the world to vacation and shop and wouldn't spend half that much to reach somebody with the gospel half way around the world and bring just one person to an eternity with Jesus Christ. We are

crippled by the indulgent mentality of a self-centered society into which most Christians have bought. And instead of thinking, "How can I sell my house and get a smaller one, take my equity and invest it in the winning of souls?" we're thinking, "How can I get more money in my house and get a bigger one?" That's just so basic.

Now we should not be foolish. We need to remember that there's a world to be won for Christ and who cares how comfortable it is for us? Misplaced priorities.

Now after we're done checking through our checkbook, check through our calendar and find out where we're spending your time. And what occupies our mind. Well, we're great at fellowship, fellowship stimulates us. We're great at teaching, teaching sort of entertains us and assists us in growth. And we're great at praise, that gives expression, but we're sure not so good at sacrificial living or sacrificial giving to reach the lost. And, I'm trying to say what Jesus said and what the Scripture indicates is that that's the only reason we're here. Every other purpose could be better accomplished in heaven. Now we've got to come to grips with this. The sad part is most Christians are content with the trivia of this life to amass the junk of this life to pad their own case, fill up their lives with all the accessories they can possibly enjoy while the world is going to hell and we're not there to reach them.

You can only reach the top of the Swiss Alps by taking just the necessary equipment for climbing and leaving behind all unnecessary accessories. It's a difficult climb. A young Englishman disagreed and proceeded along the following pattern. In the morning he showed up and he had a rather heavy brightly colored blanket, some large pieces of cheese, a bottle of wine, a couple of cameras and several lenses hanging around his neck. And also some bars of chocolate. The guide said, "You'll never make it with that. You can only take the bare necessities to make the climb." But strong willed as he was, he set off on his own in front of the group to prove to them he could do it.

The group then followed under the direction of the guide with just the bare necessities. And on the way up toward the summit, they began to notice certain things left behind. First a brightly colored blanket, then some pieces of cheese, a bottle of wine, camera equipment and some chocolate bars. Finally when they reached the top, they discovered that he was there, having jettisoned everything in the process. So many people when they find that they can't make it to the top with all their accessories, let the top go and pitch their tent in the plain and the plain is very full of tents. It is very full of tents. And the question comes to you and to me is: do we understand why we exist? Can we say to the Savior, "I know the Father sent You into the world to glorify Him by winning the lost. I know why You send me into the world to glorify Him by winning the lost. But You don't understand, I can make it with all my accessories." No, it's not so. Too many people let the top go and pitch their tent in the plain.

How many people are there out there who are past the point of being reached for whom it is too late? How many souls pass into the night of eternity while we pile up our trivia and preoccupy ourselves with indulgences? And if we say we abide in Christ, then we ought to walk the way He walked and that's how He walked.

John 3:3 (NIV)

³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Prayer

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