
Mission and Vision – our Challenge for Community

Acts 2:36-47

Introduction Every church has some mission, vision and purposes that shape what they do. Not all churches have thought through them intentionally. Some have disconnected from the Scriptures being more connected to the contemporary culture. Consciously and carefully developing a Mission and Vision Statement has helped us clarify our identity and how we live out that identity Biblically and wisely in this place at this time.

As a church together, we have established this mission for our ministry.

By God's grace and through His Word, we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people a passion for the supremacy of God *magnified* in love for Him and *manifested* in love for one another.

The church exists to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21). The universal church is the redeemed people of God placed into the Body of Christ. The local church is the people of God gathered together in localities: to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) as the Kingdom of God in this world (Colossians 1:13-14), to meet regularly together in an outward worship that expresses inward and spiritual truths (John 4:23-24; Hebrews 10:19-25; 12:18-29), and to encourage, edify, and build up one another. Therefore, we exist as a church for the following primary purposes:

EXALTATION IS OUR DOXOLOGICAL PURPOSE. It is all that we do in terms of pursuing God in worship. This is the overarching purpose of the church. The church exists to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

EDIFICATION IS OUR DISCIPLESHIP PURPOSE. It is all that we do to know God better, to please Him in every facet of life, to learn, to believe, to understand and to obey the Scriptures fully, and to love God and one another in each sphere of life as we grow in Christ-likeness.

EVANGELISM IS OUR DECLARATIVE PURPOSE. It is all that we do to proclaim the gospel to every people group in order to see all of God's elect brought into His Kingdom.

We envision being and becoming a people who are:

SAVORING THE SUPREMACY OF GOD. Our vision is to magnify God as the all-satisfying object of the believer's life in worship and service, here and forever.

STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD. Our vision is to work out both the large picture and the immediate texts in Holy Spirit enabled exposition and application in the public and private ministry of the Word of God.

SHAPING THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Our vision is to see minds, affections, and wills transformed by the Word of God so that God is magnified by an obeying faith in every sphere of life.

SPREADING THE GOSPEL OF GOD. Our vision is to proclaim the gospel to all the people groups so that God is glorified in every tribe, language, and people group.

This morning I want to reflect together on Acts 2:36-47 and the challenge for being together as a gospel community.

Examination – Biblical Observations for Purposeful Ministry

⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. [ESV]

Of their Commitment

(v.41-42)

Conversion is characterized as receiving Peter's word, of accepting the apostolic message. Their salvation then is not grounded in some transactional decision using language we are familiar with today like, "ask Jesus into your heart." Rather, a declaration that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant as the Messiah who was crucified on behalf of His people and raised for their justification and now is their appointed judge, is accepted as the truth. The call to believe is followed by the obedience of baptism. As I read this text, the great commission is being followed – making disciples is beginning with Jerusalem. Every one who believes is baptized as a public sign of the reality of an inward spiritual work. Those who are baptized having received the apostolic gospel are now added to their number. They are accounted to be part of the publicly gathered community of Christ, the church at Jerusalem.

The people professing Christ as Lord, having now been baptized and incorporated into the public assembly of believers, devote themselves to the Word, to fellowship, to the ordinances or possibly small group interaction around meals and to the prayers. Note the active, personal involvement in a commitment that is characterized by devotion. This verb is a active reflexive verb. They intentionally set forth to affirm and desire the *koinonia* of the church. The way they went about it looks like devotion. They were committed first to Christ and then to God's people.

They committed themselves to all the core and essential functions of community fellowship. Their commitment is not abstract but is specific and concrete. They were committed to sitting under the ministry of the Word. They were committed to meeting together for fellowship in all that meant. They were committed to the Lord's Table which was usually taken as part of a fellowship meal called the Agape Feast. They were committed to the formal and scheduled seasons of prayer, here called, *the prayers*. Their commitment then is intentional, personal, sacrificial and functional.

This commitment would arise because of instruction and expectation. Luke is not here talking about some sort of mystical or spontaneous surge of devotion to these things. The apostles are teaching towards this commitment as an expectation of those who are a part of the gathered community of the church. From the Scriptures, the apostles have identified these core functions of the church as essential and necessary for all believers. They are therefore calling all believers to it.

Of their Conduct

(v.43-46)

This devotion fleshed itself out in many kinds of daily responsibilities carried out in an awe of God's presence and power. It mostly looked like sacrifice in relationships, finances and time. The apostles among them were doing mighty acts of wonders and miracles. These miracles were attesting to their authority and their message. Not having these apostles among us today, the mighty acts of God that fuel awe and gratitude are both emerging from the pages of the Scripture and the narratives of His work in our own lives.

These believers also had a deep unity of heart and action. They had all things in common. This is not talking about common ownership, but common aims and actions. They recognized that they were part of a common body, a common gathered community with a common evangelistic task and a common shared stewardship. What is portrayed here is deep sense of oneness that was the foundation for their great sacrificial giving.

In their particular context, many of the new believers were pilgrims who had arrived from all over the world to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem. They had not come provisioned to stay for more than the week of Pentecost. Yet now, hundreds and possibly thousands have been converted. They are in need of basic discipleship and instruction in the Word before returning to their homes. So, many who had much sold it in order to supply the needs of the new disciples and ensure that they were properly cared for in Jerusalem and were spiritually equipped before returning home. But this is an enormous sacrificial investment by many. This is not some sort of Christian communism. It is understanding and valuing teaching and training new disciples in such a way that where much has been received from God, much is given back to God.

Of their Characteristics

(v.46b-47)

The believer's life was marked by gladness, humble simplicity and praise. Loving God and one another in a sacrificial and transforming way was accompanied by a joyful and humble passion for God. Here are God's people engaging God, one another and the world in a way that reflects the glory of God. Their hearts are full of praise and wonder. They speak and sing of the greatness of God. They are centered on God. They are looking away from themselves in way that finds their joy full and their labors easy.

The Christian life is to be characterized by holy, humble, honorable living. Yet we are often self-focused, grumbling, unhappy and wearisome people. Why is this? Could it be that we have just simply lost the wonder and awe of the amazing salvation God has given? Are we, even in a church like this, mostly about us, what we want, what we need, our agenda and our aims? But God's people in those early weeks were godly, were full of Godwardness in a way that caused them to be joyful, humble and sacrificial.

Of the Consequence

(v.47)

God added those whom He was gathering in. God was not only working powerfully by grace in the holiness and happiness of the church, but also in its growth.

There are simple observations I see in this text that relate to where we are and what we are about as a covenant community in God's Kingdom.

Biblical churches do not exist to carry out their purposes just in a location. It is entirely possible for us as a church to completely fulfill all our purposes without a building. The buildings of the church must be its servants, not its masters. Nevertheless, we live and serve in a context where it is very difficult to minister effectively without a facility. We are finding ourselves with some handicaps because of our present facility thus the desire and the plan to expand.

Biblical ministry is simpler than we often make it out to be. When programs and policies displace people, then the church has become another bureaucracy serving human ends not God's purposes. Nevertheless, a ministry will serve more effectively by prayerfully and wisely doing ministry guided by people with gifts of administration.

Biblical ministry requires commitment. I am not talking about a minimum effort to keep things going. I am talking about a lifestyle of sacrificial commitment to each and every purpose of the church. Out of the September series on The Church as Community, we expect a greater commitment to the foundations and the functions of this gathered church.

Biblical ministry is a lifestyle. If church is all you do and all you are just on Sunday, then you do not understand Biblical Christianity. We are the church, every moment of every day. It is not just what we do when we are doing church that is to be shaped by these powerful purposes, but every facet of all our lives.

Emerging from this text, and from many others, are three powerful purposes that are to shape all our life together.

Exaltation – The Doxological Purpose of the Church

This is the only permanent purpose of the church. It is an overarching and primary purpose. It shapes the church by its Godwardness. It is what we have been doing up to this point. We exalt and magnify the name and character and worth and works of Jesus.

Praise – Speaking Truth with Passion

Our worship of God must be characterized by spirit and truth. It must be the union of spiritual realities with objective truth. Simply put, our praise and prayer must be true to the Word and real to us. And it must move our affections and our wills. The truths of the gospel: the supremacy of God and the preeminence of Jesus and the provision for holiness and the presence of the Spirit will move believing souls. It will awaken deadened hearts. It will open silent lips and blind eyes. It will save and transform and give us small sips of the full flavor of our future glory.

Proclaim – Declaring Truth with Power

My passion is for "expository exaltation" (Piper). I want to declare the truth and expound the Word so that you and I are changed. I long and hunger for the presence of the Spirit and the power of God that attended great Biblical exposition of the men of God in the past. I want to explain this Book to you so that your lives are transformed by believing obedience for glory of Jesus.

Practice – Obeying Truth in Purity

The third facet in our worship is what we do after we leave. Worship is not just singing, not just hearing preaching, but it is also obeying. It is a life transformed by the majesty of God and the clarity of the Word and the power of the Spirit for holiness. Our praise and preaching must bring about holy and happy saints. The most important thing about our worship services is the obedience it fuels through the rest of week.

Edification – The Discipleship Purpose of the Church

We are a community of people whom God has called and saved. We are on the path of transformation together. One day, we will come to be glorified together with all the believers of all ages. While we are together, we have this purpose: to disciple one another into mature believers.

Now this purpose fleshes itself out in the New Testament in several ways. All of these are evident in Jesus' discipling of the Twelve and Paul's mentoring of churches and ministries and people. Edification and discipleship take place when there are Biblical structures for three important functions.

Instruction – Developing Faith for Holiness

The Bible places a huge value on the teaching of the Scriptures. There must be instruction. It must be an instruction aimed at building trust in God's promises and power. In them we have all we need to live a life of godliness (2 Peter 1:2-4). Biblical instruction is to be aimed at transformation. This is its aim, but not its filter. This is something we are confused about today. We take a Biblical purpose and pervert it. We say, give me instruction that tells me how to live or meets my needs *and only that*. Paul said that the elders at Ephesus knew that he had fully expounded the whole counsel of God. So we must teach about God's person, promises, provisions, purposes, principles and precepts and be changed and transformed by them as they rebuild the way we think. We teach the Bible so that you will believe God in an obeying way. In the end, you only do what you believe.

Fellowship – Cultivating Relationships for Encouragement

Discipleship requires that we fellowship. Now stop just a moment and listen carefully. What we do in providing opportunities to be together as Christians is not fellowship. These events and opportunities are when fellowship can occur. But there must be intentionality on your part to use those opportunities for community. When we use those (and other opportunities) to cultivate relationships that will sustain faith and encourage hope—that is fellowship.

Cultivating relationships involves getting deeper than surface talk. It means getting to know one another so that trust is built. We use the word, "cultivate" here on purpose. Cultivating means "to work hard at causing something to grow." It means that we will prepare the soil. We will plant the seed. We will water it regularly. We will weed out what would choke our fellowship. And then, when it is ready, we will reap the harvest of a fruitful relationship. In order to cultivate these kinds of relationship we must accept one another where we are in our walk with the Lord and then helping one another to go further.

Cultivating true *koinonia* is also a private or personal exercise. We will cultivate relationships outside of the opportunities and events of the church. We make time to

talk to one another and be with one another. We work hard at changing our way of thinking, our attitudes, our desires that erect obstacles to this kind of fellowship.

Ministry – Exercising Gifts for Edification

Discipleship means that we serve God by serving one another in the church. God has given each one of you a unique mix of spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality and experience—as Rick Warren puts it, this is your SHAPE. Each one of you has been placed in this church by God. You are important and you are needed. Without you being actively involved in ministering to people, some ministry in our church suffers. When that happens, all of the church is affected.

It is important for me to have a shepherding (pastoral) word with you. I want every believer no matter how young or how old you are to listen and give me your undivided attention for a moment. We have been heavily involved in this church in *crises discipleship* or what we have commonly called *counseling*. But that is only one level of discipleship. There must be a discipleship for new believers that teaches the basics in the gospel, grace and growth. There must also be a discipling that is engaged in bringing every believer to maturity. There must be a discipleship that prepares believers for stages in life (marriage, children, etc.). And finally, there is crises discipleship that gives hope and help by grace to people who have been overcome by sin or an issue of life. As God enables us, we will work at growing and developing all aspects of discipleship, including teaching other churches how we do it.

Evangelism – The Outward Purpose of the Church

I place this one last in our thinking, not because it is least, but because I want you to go from here thinking about it the most.

Missions and evangelism is not the primary purpose of the church – glorifying God is. Missions and evangelism exist because glorifying God in every community and city and nation and language and people group does not. Just as edification is the God-centered maturity that comes from believing God in an obeying way, so evangelism is the God-centered calling of all people to glorify God by trusting and submitting to Him.

To the Neighborhoods – Preaching the Gospel in Our Community

A few years ago we sensed the great need to focus on our responsibility and opportunities to preach the gospel in our immediate communities. To that end, we called Pastor Dan to the eldership as a vocational elder to oversee our Spreading the Gospel of God ministries. He has established a team, training and many opportunities for evangelism. Every person who has the spiritual gift of evangelism needs to be serving with Dan. Beyond that, every person here ought to be spreading the gospel as much as their ability and opportunity allows.

New Testament ministry is both a *go and tell* and a *come and see* evangelism. Go and tell is the individual responsibility while come and see is our corporate opportunity. In our over reaction to Armenian theology and practice and our disdain for seeker churches, we can simply become club Clearcreek. Do you believe that your neighbor, your friend, your family will die and spend an eternity in hell if they are not reached with the gospel? And if you do not feel competent to witness to them, at least you can share with them your testimony. How about inviting them to church?

So, will you go and tell this week so that people will come and see next week?

To the Nations – Pioneering the Gospel to all People Groups

Finally, we must be involved in sending the gospel throughout the world. I pray that God would raise up people in our church with a burning passion for missions, who love missionaries and give sacrificially so we can send more. I pray that some among you would give up the comfort of home to go.

Conclusion What are these truths going to require of us?

Total commitment – The believers of the New Testament made a commitment that is called *devoted to*. Does your commitment to this community of believers look like devotion?

Sacrificial living – The believers of the New Testament altered their lifestyle to free them for daily ministry. They sacrificed much to see that God was magnified greatly. Does our lifestyle look like sacrifice for Christ?

Expectant attitude – The believers of the New Testament expected God to do great things. Mighty works of grace and power attended what they did. There was a constant sense that God was about something powerful and amazing. Do we come with a sense of expectant excitement to our church?

What continued areas of growth and change will these truths bring about in ministry? Here are some areas that are being designed and developed for the future.

A greater emphasis on all the purposes of the church at the ministry level. One of our aims has been that Clearcreek will be as well known as a place of God exalting worship and wide reaching evangelism as we are known for life transforming counseling and discipleship. In order to continue to grow in these areas, we are working on and thinking through ministry level mission, vision, purpose and strategies.

A prayerful and wise development of ministry infrastructures to prepare for the growth we believe and expect God will give us. To this end, we are calling for a full involvement of every member at the Chapel to exercise your gifts and abilities and experience-to labor in ministry because God is at work in you.

An emphasis in this ministry year on the church as a community. To that end, we called Mark Schindler to the Eldership last year as Pastor for Worship and Community. This past year, he has worked hard with our finance team as his primary emphasis. This coming year, he will be spending time publicly and privately helping us develop and grow as a gathered community of people. For the rest of September, he will be leading us in the morning services on a Biblical Theology of Community. In the evening services, different elders will be working through foundational and functional elements to start, strengthen and sustain our community fellowship and life together.

Hard work in developing opportunities for leadership training and advanced Biblical studies for those interested. We are considering implementing a program here that will give anyone interested further Biblical training. A component of that training are tracks designed to prepare people for ministry and men for the eldership. Other components will allow a person to get a degree in ministry by doing advanced work without having to leave and go away to school. In other words, in the context of our church community, you can become better equipped to serve God.

Praying hard and giving sacrificially to see us reach our benchmark and be able to break ground on our adult educational facility expansion. The first Sunday of October, Pastor Mark on behalf the finance team, facility expansion team and the elders will be launching a capital campaign designed to bring this plan into fruition.

My prayer is that we will experience the amazing power of God in the coming year. If we will press forward with Scripture informed trust and Spirit inspired cooperation, then God may be pleased to move on our behalf. May we be able to look back in 2008 at our annual congregational meeting and see that God has shaped us by these powerful purposes for the glory of Jesus.