

Back to the Basics

Why are we here?

I love Bill Cosby's humor. He really has a knack for finding the ridiculous hidden inside daily life and bringing it to the forefront so we can laugh at ourselves.

While my favorite segments of his craft revolve around children, he did a piece once which involved basic philosophy. And you all know how much I dig philosophy...Bill Cosby was a P.E. major in college and, like me, was forced to take a philosophy class. When his professor asked the class, "Why is there air?" Bill, ever the astute philosopher, answered, "Every Phys Ed major knows that, it's to pump up volleyballs with." Ah, yes, deep philosophical stuff –reminds me of om-fo-lo-skep-sis again...Another one of the great philosophical axioms is, "Why are we here?" I would like to take a few minutes this morning and answer that question with the "we" being "the church."

For the past ten weeks I have been preaching a sermon series called Back to the Basics discussing the basic Christian doctrines Baptists believe. Today, I want to complete the series with a brief review of the purposes of the Church. No, I am not going to give you a highly-organized, clearly-structured, neatly-packaged, linear history of the church (as much fun as that would be). That would cause far too many bloody noses from people doing face plants into the pew back in front of them as they nodded off – and I'm signed up to clean the sanctuary this month so I don't want that!

I want to take a few minutes just to remind us all why Valley View is here today. What our purpose of existence is. Why all the basic doctrines and beliefs I have covered in the last two months are important and what we should be doing with them. I have categorized the purposes of the local church into four basic functions:

Worship

Proclamation

Discipleship

Fellowship

Before we can talk about the purposes of the church, we need to start with a definition of “the church.” The church has two common definitions. In the greatest sense, the church is the universal body of Christ. Scripture also refers to it as the “bride of Christ.” Both of these terms refer to the group of all followers of Jesus past, present, and future.

The other definition of the church refers to the individual local churches which began after Jesus’ ascension and is also referred to as the “New Testament Church.” While there are two different definitions here, it is important to remember that the local church functions as a subset of the universal church and consists of a body of believers with Christ as their head.

This morning I will be focusing on the local church and addressing the question, “Why are we here.” The first purpose of the local church is to...

Worship:

On the surface this sounds like a blinding flash of the obvious, but far too many churches have fallen out of the habit of truly worshipping God during their services. I am not talking about singing a song or listening politely to the sermon. I am talking about the kind of worship we read about in Revelation 4, ⁸ *And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say,*

“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME.”

⁹ And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹¹ “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

True Worship includes the total person, both mind and emotion, in a way that calls him to praise God for who He is and what He has done, in so doing to reach for new awareness, to learn more of God. When we read other passages in Revelation that describe life around God’s throne, we come to a conviction that worship of God is what we were created for.

I believe that worship is the first business of the church. Worship is the mainspring for all else a church does; it provides the church’s direction as people praise God and listen to His words. The church needs to worship God – heart, mind, and soul to bring ourselves to a place where He can mold us into what He intends for us to be and use us for His work. Once we develop a true heart of worship, God can use us for His other divine purposes.

PROCLAMATION:

The proclamation of the Gospel to all people everywhere is NOT an option. It is at the very center of what a church is all about. Jesus made this abundantly clear in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20): ¹⁸ *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

God’s plan is that those who have accepted His love and have believed on Jesus are to be living evidence of their salvation and that life is to include verbal witnessing. There are two quick points I want to make about this. First, I want you to note that Jesus sent us forth with power. Acts 1:8 says, ⁸ *but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

God won’t bring you to it if He won’t get you through it. This power for proclamation guarantees effectiveness. The beautiful thing about being a witness is that you are simply testifying about the truth. Being able to tell someone that, “God loves you, Jesus died for you, and you can have the free gift of salvation by simply believing on Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross” should be no harder than saying, “I am currently in Alaska.” They are both statements of fact – not your opinion and not anything someone else just made up. Just state the facts – and remember, it’s not your job to CONVINCe anyone; that’s the Holy Spirit’s job. You just need to tell.

The second point I want you to understand is that we are required to speak “as we go.” A very literal translation of Matthew 28:19 would read, “Going, therefore,

disciple all the nations.” The idea is to witness as we go. Witnessing is a lifestyle, not an event. The task is too urgent to wait for the perfect time. Next week, we will begin a new discipleship training course on becoming a contagious Christian. This course will help us all gain confidence in how we can be effective witnesses in our daily lives. I hope every one of you can join us and invite a friend.

DISCIPLESHIP

Speaking of discipleship training...a church develops disciples through Bible Study, training opportunities, and involvement in ministry. Discipleship is an ongoing, life-long process. The only way to grow is to go. Just as we wouldn't expect a child never sent to school to grow academically, we shouldn't expect to grow in spiritual maturity without taking advantage of training opportunities to study God's word and learn how to better apply it to our lives.

Discipleship is not free. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus speaking to His disciples, says, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.* If we want to mature as Disciples of Christ, it costs us time, and a willingness to put Christ first in our lives. Churches need to offer and encourage doctrinally sound and relevant training to our members. As a church's members become better disciples, we will grow closer to God and become more effective for Him.

FELLOWSHIP:

Fellowship should be an all-encompassing purpose of the church. Paul referred to the fellowship of the early NT church extensively in his writings. They met daily and broke bread together. They had fellowship with each other and with Christ. Fellowship is more than just fun, food, and friends, it is a connection with believers

that bonds us together by the Spirit, and whose foundation is Jesus Christ. The church should be in a continual state of fellowship with its members encouraging one another, helping each other out, and contributing to the communal needs.

A church that can worship joyfully, proclaim the Gospel proudly, disciple its members diligently, and fellowship freely will be a healthy church where God will be glorified, believers will grow and rejoice, and the lost will be found. Let's start with a little more worship (Come, now is the time to Worship).