

Why Are We Here?

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.

June 26, 2022

Purpose: This sermon is intended to focus upon “WHY” are we here? The church needs to re-examine the purposes of the church. The church needs to realize that there are five major purposes for being here: Discipleship, Community, Worship, Ministry, and Evangelism. Through this series of sermons, it is my prayer we try to re-focus all the efforts of the church under these five areas.

Text: Acts 2:42-47

When you open the book of Acts, you find the book is actually the second volume of a two-book set written by the Apostle Luke. The Book of Luke gives us the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Book of Acts gives us the history of the church. Acts chapter one opens with Jesus’ ascension and Mattathias is selected to replace Judas. Acts chapter two opens with the birthday of the Church – Pentecost. Those 120 individuals that were gathered there in the Upper Room were waiting on God just as Jesus had instructed them to do. They met daily, praying and fasting, waiting for power to come to them from on high.



Like the rush of a mighty wind, and tongues of fire, the Spirit of God descended upon them and empowered them with boldness to proclaim the



mighty works of God. Peter stood up and began to preach to them with passion concerning the events they had all witnessed just 50 days earlier. When Peter finished speaking and the others finished telling those gathered there in Jerusalem in various languages of the mighty works of God, three thousand souls gladly received the words of Peter and received Christ as their Savior and were baptized.

I am sure the disciples asked themselves the question, “Now that the Holy Spirit has given us power and over three thousand have joined our community of faith, ‘What are we going to do?’” The passage of scripture that I read this morning answers the question as to what they did. *“They continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*



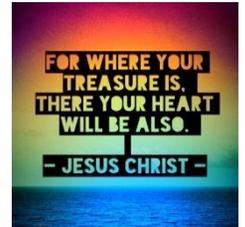
Every generation since the founding of that first community of believers has had to answer that same question, *“What are we going to do?”* Before we can begin to plan what we do, we need to ask ourselves the question, *“Why are we here?”*

The Long-Range Planning Committee has spent a lot of time grappling with this question. Out of those discussions, we have attempted to answer that question: We are here to ... *Worship God, Serve Him, and Serve Others.*

If you take a moment and look at the name of our church, I hope it will give you a clue as to what was important to the founding members of Spilman Memorial Baptist Church.

B. W. Spilman took the Great Commission found in Matthew 28 seriously. *“Go ye into all the world teaching them to observe all I have taught you.”* B. W. Spilman was instrumental in beginning Sunday School classes all over North Carolina. He wanted boys and girls to learn about Jesus and trust Him as their Savior.

If you want to know what is important to an individual, look at what they spend their money on. The same measure is for a church too. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.



Financially, our church supports many different organizations and missions' groups. Through our budget, we support the Baptist State Convention, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Neuse Baptist Association, and many different organizations located here in Lenoir County. We support the Lottie Moon Foreign Missions offering at Christmas and the Annie Armstrong Easter offering. We have supported the Samaritans Purse Organization through their shoebox program.



Many individuals in our church have been personally involved in many different missions. Each of you can be on missionary where you are. Our people are involved. We may not be standing on the street corner preaching, but we are demonstrating Christ-likeness where ever we go. Your life is your witness. You are making a difference.

The answer to the question as to “Why are we here?” is found in Acts 2: 42-47. From every book I have read, from every person I have met lately, the question continues to arise is how can the church of today, integrate the timeless message of scripture with a culture that is drifting – no fleeing – from the institutional, traditional church? The changes we face today are startling.



In the book, “*Rethinking the Church*” by James Emory White, he shares the following observations: He said:



My grandfather lived well into his nineties. Toward the end of his life, he made a comment that deeply intrigued me. He said, “Jim, I’ve seen the world go from the horse and buggy to the space shuttle.” A few of our members in this church can attest to that same statement. A person who has lived over 90 years on this earth has witnessed nothing less than the transformation of the world. But then I realized that it is the same for you and me.

Today, over 4000 books are being printed every day. A single edition of the New York Times includes more information than the average person in seventeenth-century England encountered over the course of his or her lifetime.

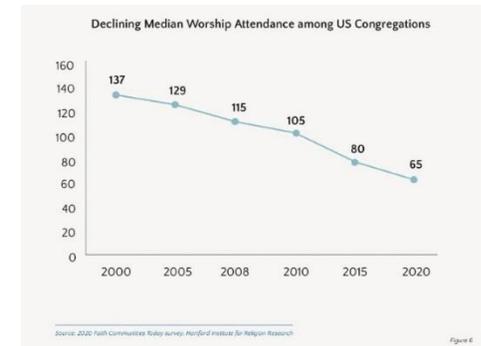


For decades most companies have operated on the basis of Adam Smith’s insight that industrial work is best carried out by breaking everything down into its most basic tasks.

Yet there is a growing awareness in businesses today that **what was successful in the past may not be successful in the future**. In the book, *Reengineering the Corporation*, the authors note that “the time has come to retire those principles and adopt a new way of doing business.

Rethinking has had to take place in every other sphere of our modern life. From the media to the government, education to the military, rethinking foundational issues as structure and strategy has become absolutely necessary, not only to prosper, but also to survive. Leith Anderson writes that the church also needs to revisit its primary purposes.

¹While many of the liberal and moderate Christian churches have shown decline, some of the more conservative Christian churches have actually seen an increase in attendance. During the ten-year period from 1995 to 2005, the Presbyterian Church declined by 13%, United Church in Christ declined by 17%, Episcopal declined by 11%, but on the plus side, Southern Baptist have increased by 4%, Nazarene by 5% and the Assemblies of God increased by 21%². The Southern Baptist Convention has stated that 70% of their churches have plateaued or are declining. Even though I do not have statistics over the past few years, from everyone I have been talking with, church attendance and participation has slipped even more.



Declining Worship Attendance US Congregations

What do the unchurched people out in the world have to say to us in the church? James White canvassed his area in Charlotte North Carolina and found these eight areas of dissatisfaction with the church.



1. There is no value in attending. – 74%
2. Churches have too many problems. – 61%
3. I do not have the time. – 48%
4. I am simply not interested. – 42%
5. Churches ask for money too frequently. – 40%
6. Church services are usually boring. – 36%
7. Christian churches hold no relevance for the way I live. – 34%
8. I do not believe in God, or I am unsure that God exists. – 12%

If people were asked in 1968 which country would dominate the world in watch making during the 1990's, the answer would have been Switzerland. Why? Because it had dominated the world of watch making the past 60 years.

In 1968, the Swiss made 65% of all watches and earned over 90% of the profit. By 1980, only 12 years later, they controlled less than 10% of the market. Between 1979 and 1981, fifty thousand of the sixty-two thousand Swiss watchmakers lost their jobs. Why? Because they failed to consider the impact of the Quartz movement on their industry. The Swiss refused to consider the new developments around them. The Swiss dismissed this new technology because the watch operated without a spring or winding stem. Seiko on the other hand accepted the changes and became the leader in the watch industry.

Stopping to ask the question, “**Why are we here?**” Or “**What business are we in?**” helps us to go back to the foundational principles upon which the church was originally established. This rethinking process has nothing to do with compromising the message of the church. It is an attempt to honestly assess if we are doing what a church should be doing.

We as a church need to revisit our foundational questions.

In the 1800's no other business matched the financial and political dominance of the railroad. Trains dominated the transportation industry of the United States, moving people and goods throughout the United States. Almost every town had the railroad running through town down through Main Street. Goods from all over were loaded and unloaded for distribution all over the United States.



In the book, *In Search for Excellence*, Tom Peters points out that the railroad leaders **did not understand** what business they were in. They thought they were in the railroad business when in fact they were in the transportation business. When the car came along, they did not take advantage of their unique strength to participate in this changing transportation development.



The fundamental questions are important for every organization, business, or even a church. What business are we in? The answers for the church are layered beneath tradition, habit, custom, ritual, convention, and routine. To examine the “**Why are we here**” question, we must get underneath the programs of our day and focus on what it is those methods and programs are attempting to achieve.

1. What is the purpose of the church?
2. What is the mission of the church?
3. Who are we trying to reach for Christ?
4. What determines whether the church is alive and growing?
5. How will we accomplish the mission God has given us?

Let us look at that first question – “**What is the purpose of the church?**”



During WWII, the Nazis set up a camp factory in Hungary where prisoners were made to labor amid awful conditions. One day the prisoners were ordered to move a huge pile of garbage from one end of the camp to the other. The next day, they were ordered to move the pile back to its original location. No reason was given, they were just told to do it.

This established a pattern. Every day, they moved that garbage pile from one area to another. One day, an elderly prisoner began sobbing uncontrollably. Another screamed and ran towards the electrified fence and died. In the days to follow, more were going insane and killing themselves. These prisoners were part of an experiment to determine what would happen if people were subjected to meaningless

activity. The commandant remarked at the rate the prisoners were killing themselves, there would be no need to use the gas chambers.



Alan Cox has written that any person or organization that has lost its purpose, has lost its soul.

The best passage in the scripture that clearly tells us our purpose as a church is found in Acts 2:42-47

⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵ And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. ⁴⁶ And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷ Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.³



From this passage, it is clear that the early church was devoted to the apostle’s teaching. This is what can be described as **Discipleship**.

The early church was also devoted to fellowship – This is known as **Community**.

The early church was devoted to breaking of bread, to prayer, and to meeting together in the temple courts. This we have described as **Worship**.

The early church was devoted to meeting the needs of other people – **Ministry**.

Finally, the church was devoted to church growth, particularly through conversion. This is what we call **Evangelism**.

These five areas – ***Discipleship, Community, Worship, Ministry, and Evangelism*** – constitute the business of the church. This is what a church should be doing. Like the railroad, the church can also forget its fundamental purpose. Sometimes the church can fall prey to thinking that we must maintain a certain tradition, hold a particular event, or keep a certain committee. These activities may flow out of the purpose of the church, but they are not the purpose itself.

Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, calls churches to recapture the Biblical purpose and then look at everything their church does through those purposes. By doing this, we can say YES to some projects and NO to others. Everything a church does should flow out of these five purposes found in scripture.

There is an old story about a lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline. Once a month he would receive



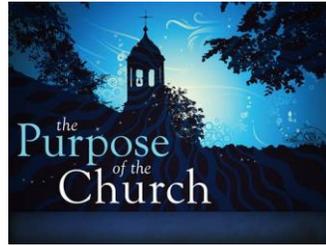
a new supply of oil to keep the light burning so that the ships could safely sail near the rocky coast. One night a woman from a nearby village came and begged him for some of his oil to keep her family warm. Another time a father asked to use some for his lamp. Another person needed some to lubricate a wheel. Since all the requests seemed legitimate, the lighthouse keeper tried to please everyone and grant the requests of all.

Towards the end of the month, he noticed his supply of oil was very low. Soon it was gone, and one night the light on the lighthouse went out. As a result, that evening several ships were wrecked and countless lives were lost. When the authorities investigated, the man was very apologetic. He told them he was just trying to be helpful with the oil. Their reply to his excuses, was simple and to the point. “You were given oil for one purpose, and one purpose only – to keep that light burning!”

There is no end to the demands placed on a church’s time and resources. As a result, our primary purposes must be what we are primarily doing.

Over the next several weeks, I want us to examine these five areas of purpose for the church. It is so easy to say, “Yes, I agree that is what the church is supposed to be doing.” The question we must ask ourselves is “Which of these five areas is lacking in MY life and what steps do I need to take to help re-prioritize my life?”

→ If we are not involved in **making disciples** of one another through the study of God's word, then we are failing in that area. Are you involved in a systematic study of God's word?



→ If we are not coming together regularly to pray and break bread together, then we are failing in **worship**. Weekly attendance with a body of believers makes all the difference in a Christian's success or failure. We are designed to worship – we don't need to neglect this area.

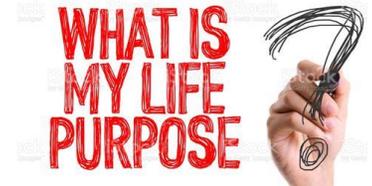
→ If we do not associate with one another in **fellowship** outside these four walls, are we really a community of faith? We need to create opportunities for individuals to meet and fellowship together in each other's homes. We must begin breaking bread together and praying for one another.

→ If we do not try to meet the needs of others (**ministering**) in our community – feeding the hungry, helping the poor, visiting those in prison, then we are only ministering to ourselves. A survey was taken of over 1000 church members. Of those that responded to the survey, 89% said that the primary purpose of the church was to take care of its members. Only 11% said that the primary purpose of the church is to minister to others outside the church and bring others to Christ.

→ If we are not dedicated to growing this church through conversion, sharing the message of salvation found only in Jesus Christ (**Evangelism**) – then we are failing in

the Great Commission. This is not primarily the job of the pastor; it is everyone's job to share their faith with others.

We all need to stop occasionally and ask ourselves these questions



Am I doing what Christ would have me to do?

What God would have you to do?

Am I attending a Bible study regularly?

Am I attending worship services regularly?

Am I studying the Bible consistently day by day?

Is God asking you to commit your life to a life of service to him?

Then there is that all important question, "What is my purpose?"

We need to yield our lives to God.

The only safe place to be (personally and corporately) is in the center of God's will.

LET US PRAY

Sources:

¹<https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2021/11/1/the-real-reason-churches-are-in-decline> (Declining Church Attendance graph, accessed 6/20/2022)

²http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html (accessed June 2, 2012)

³ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1999. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA