

Why Are We Here?
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A few years ago, a woman called the church office. She said she had heard some real good things about our congregation and was interested in attending, but she had one concern. She had been told that a person had to pay money, annual dues, if he or she wanted to come to this church. Some of you are thinking, “Uh oh, no one told me about this.” But, as I explained to her, this was certainly not the case. I told the woman we would be delighted to have her attend, even if she never put one penny in the church offering plate. Now, that gal never started attending Chisholm Baptist Church, yet, that phone call reminded me how the church, including our church, is often misunderstood by the people around us. Folks out there have all sorts of “interesting,” mistaken, ideas about Chisholm Baptist Church. We need to try to clear up those misunderstandings. In order to do that, we need to clearly understand the purpose of this church, in other words know, “Why we are here.”

Now, many of you are relatively new to Chisholm Baptist Church and are maybe still trying to get a sense of what this church is all about. (How many of you have started attending Chisholm Baptist Church in the last five years?) Others of you have been part of this congregation for a much longer time, but without reminders I think any of us can forget the reason why we are here. It is far too easy to slip into thinking that a church is nothing more than what Mark Twain described when he said, “The church is a place where a nice respectable person stands up in front of other nice respectable people and urges them to be nicer and more respectable.” Friends, church should be, must be, about much more than being respectable. So, for the next few weeks that will be our focus. Why are we here? What is the purpose of a church, specifically of Chisholm Baptist Church? What are the practical things we should be doing to fulfill the purpose to which the Lord has called us? Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use His word to help us start finding some answers to those questions today.

I want to start with quick answers to a couple of preliminary questions. **First**, why look at the Bible to see what the purpose of a church should be? Well, we go to the Bible because it is

God’s word. The church belongs to God, and the Lord Jesus is head of the church. The most important question is not: what do we want our church to do? But: what does God want our church to do? “But, Pastor Dan, that book is almost two thousand years old and the church’s purpose has certainly changed during that time, hasn’t it?” No, friends, I do not think so. I believe the Bible provides authoritative, trustworthy instructions for the church at all times and all places. For about 98% of church history, up until about the last forty years, almost all Christians agreed with that. It is only in recent years that some have started to suggest that some of what the Bible teaches is no longer appropriate for the church. In many situations, it would seem strange that instructions are still relevant two thousand years after they were given. Yet, since with the Lord, one day is no different than a thousand years, 2 Peter 3:8, it is no surprise that the words he has spoken still provide the guidance a church needs.

It is also important to remember that since Jesus is the head of the church, no one else has a right to redefine what a church should be about or doing. Yes, we could get a focus group together and ask a dozen people to tell us what they think the purpose of the church should be, or we could take a survey and find out what most American’s think the church should be about. Or maybe every ten years pastors and other church leaders could get together for a big convention and vote on what the church should be doing for the next decade. We could do those things, but ***Ephesians 2:20*** says the church is: *Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.* Friends, it is the apostles, prophets, and most importantly, Jesus Christ, who determines what the church’s purpose is. They speak to us through the Bible, and that is why we look to this book to determine why we are here.

The **second** question is this: Are we talking about what the purpose of every church should be, or just Chisholm Baptist Church? The answer is: both. I suspect almost everything I say would apply to any Christian church. However, I have no intention of pointing fingers at other congregations. My primary concern is that we at Chisholm Baptist Church are doing what God calls

us to do. Now, in many ways, I think we are doing that. A few weeks ago, R. V. and Jenny Hodge were here worshipping with us. Even though it has been about twelve years since they moved to North Carolina, they still said, "Whenever we go to a church we find ourselves comparing it to Chisholm Baptist Church because that is our standard of what a church should be like." Friends, that is a great compliment. However, even though the Hodges are wonderful, godly people, it is the Lord's evaluation of a church, not theirs, not mine, not yours, which really matters. My guess is that I think the Lord would say, "Folks at Chisholm Baptist Church are doing a pretty good job, but there is a lot of room for improvement." So, our focus is not on what other churches should be doing, but on what we need to learn.

Okay, now to our main question: so why are we here? Probably the simplest thing to say is that the purpose of this church is to glorify God. Actually, that is the purpose of every human being, "To glorify and enjoy Him forever," as the Westminster Catechism so aptly puts it. **1 Corinthians 10:31** tells us, *Whether you eat drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* **1 Peter 4:11** says that those who serve in the church should do it, *"so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."* The church is to glorify God. That is the bottom line. and there are two key passages in the Bible which tell us how we can be doing that. The first is Matthew 22:37-40 where the Lord defines the Great Commandments. A religious leader, a Pharisee asks Jesus, **Matthew 22:36** "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?" Those of us who have read the Bible, realize the Old Testament contains not just the Ten Commandments, but many different commands, 613 is the most common count. Even though the Pharisee was asking what he thought was a trick question, in many ways it was a good one. Is there any way to prioritize all these commands? Jesus gives a very good and very true answer: **Matthew 22:37-40** He said to him, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."* In other words, Jesus says all the commands in this whole book can be summed up in two, love God and love other people. It is that simple. These are universal commands. God expects all people in all places and

at all times to obey them. As we read through the New Testament it is clear that is what He expects of the church. So, part of the reason Chisholm Baptist Church is here so that we might express our love toward God and others.

The second passage which is a key to understanding the purpose of the church is what is called The Great Commission. As Jesus met with His disciples following His resurrection, **Matthew 28:18-20** (He) said to them, *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Now, some folks suggest that Jesus was giving this commission to the disciples (now eleven without Judas) and not to the rest of us. However, a couple of things make it clear that Jesus intends all Christians to be involved in fulfilling this commission.

First Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." He did not say, "Until the end of your lives." Even today, the end of the age is still to come. Second, when we read the book of Acts and the New Testament letters written by the apostles, we see this commission being carried out, not just by eleven or twelve apostles, but by a lot of other folks as well. That includes the Apostle Paul who was not present when The Great Commission was given. People like Apollos, Priscilla, Aquila, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus and many others all worked to help people become believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, or what the Lord Jesus calls "disciples."

Friends, these two biblical texts show us how a church can glorify God and gives us four reasons why Chisholm Baptist Church is here.

First, we are here to worship God. We have been commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and worship is our expression of that love. Yes, we can worship God in many different ways and places, but for a church, worship occurs primarily when we come together and express our praise to the Lord for who He is and what He has done. The Sunday morning gathering like this is the most important time of doing that, but it can happen at other meetings as well. We use songs, scripture readings, prayers, offerings, communion and baptism to express our love to Him. I am afraid we sometimes fail to appreciate what an important privilege and

responsibility worship is. Some tend to view what happens in the first part of the service here on Sunday mornings as preliminaries to the main event, or as the pre-game show. We sing a few songs as a warm-up for why we are really here—the sermon.

Now, certainly preaching a sermon can be an act of worship on my part, and listening to the sermon can be an act of worship on your part. Longing to hear God speak to you through His word is a true expression of love. Yet, singing a song of praise, listening to the choir, or reading a biblical text responsively can be just as important on Sunday morning as a sermon. As we seek to express our adoration and gratitude to God. The Psalms contain many exhortations for God's people to worship the Lord with gladness to come before Him with joyful songs. *Ephesians 5:19*, Paul commands the church to *(Speak) to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord*. Friends, we are here, Chisholm Baptist Church is here, to worship God.

Second, we are here to show love for others. This flows out of that second Great Commandment, love your neighbor as yourself. One of the things this means is that it is our job to show love to anyone in our community with whom we come in contact. It doesn't matter if that person is an alcoholic, an atheist, or a homosexual. It doesn't matter if every other word out of their mouth is profanity, or if they have not taken a shower or bath in two months. Every person who comes in contact with Chisholm Baptist Church should be treated with kindness and respect. Now, this does not mean that we necessarily condone someone's beliefs or lifestyle. Sometimes love demands that we confront others about their sin. Love simply means that we are concerned about the wellbeing of the other person. Oh, it is not easy. Some people seem to naturally like everyone they meet. I don't know about you, but that is not me. There are numerous folks who just kind of rub me the wrong way—not anyone in this room, of course, but those people are out there. And frankly, I think Jesus expected that is how it would be, because He told us, Matthew 5:44, to love our enemies. He assumes we will have some. So, if someone really bugs me because he keeps saying, the Vikings are going to beat the Packers this year, I have a specific command from the Lord to love that individual. And as a congregation we have a

specific command to love those who oppose the Lord's work.

We as a church need to have a strong love for the folks out there, we need to have an even greater love for those in here. Listen to *Galatians 6:10* *Therefore as we opportunity, let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers*. Friend, if you are part of this congregation, this church is your home, your family. When you goof up out there, and everyone is down on you, this is the place where you should be able to come for shelter because the people love you. Oh, that doesn't mean they excuse your sin. No, one will smile at you and say, "Oh, I heard you have been watching a lot of pornography lately. Isn't that wonderful." But, there should be support, encouragement and help available. It comes in a variety of ways.

Many times, I have had the privilege of going to someone and saying, "I know you have been going through a hard time recently. The church board wanted to help, so they asked me to give you this check." Sometimes the individual is hesitant to receive that gift. And I say, "If you think someone else needs the money more than you do, please give it to them, or put it in the offering plate. But, remember we are family. A spiritual family. We take care of each other. That is one reason why we are here. Please don't let pride keep this church from doing its job." Friends, this love for one another, sharing life together, is what the Bible speaks of as fellowship. For some reason, we usually associate fellowship with food. Yes, the time we have with coffee and cookies between the worship service is part of fellowship, but there should be much more than that. We are here to love each other. That includes a lot of hugs and hearty handshakes, but most important it means putting that love into action and really serving one another.

Third, we are here to proclaim the gospel. The Great Commission contains one command: Go and make disciples. There are, however, two parts in doing that. The first is to tell folks who are not Christians who Jesus is and what He has done for us. We are to encourage them to trust and follow Him. We often call that evangelism. The message we are to share is that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead to guarantee our salvation. It culminates with the promise that all, who are enabled by the Holy Spirit, trust in Jesus Christ as

Lord and Savior, then become God's children and receive eternal salvation. We are to share this message with both those in our community and with those who live in other parts of the world. The Bible's phrase is Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. For us that means we are concerned that everyone who walks in this room becomes aware of the forgiveness, hope and joy that can be found by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone. Almost every Sunday, we remind people of the truth summed up so beautifully in **John 3:16** *For God so loved world, that He gave His one and only son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.* We try to make it clear there is no one so bad that he or she is somehow beyond the reach of God's amazing, saving, grace and there is no one good enough to somehow make it to heaven, or even make it in this life, without that grace. Friend, if you are not trusting in the Lord Jesus, if you have not experienced His salvation in your life, I urge you to talk to someone before you leave this morning.

Our commitment to the gospel, the great news of Jesus Christ, also means we have our family night on Wednesday evenings, so folks of all ages in this community can come learn about salvation through Jesus Christ. It means we spread that message across the Iron Range through services broadcast on the radio and local cable television. It means we support missionaries like Rivers and Becky Camp bringing the gospel to people in the African country of Chad. Now, maybe most of the people you know claim to be Christians, and many maybe even go to church. That is great, though remember professing faith and possessing faith, can be very different things. Yet, even if all who claim to be Christians truly are, there are still plenty of people around us who are clearly not believers in Jesus Christ. And friends, those folks are not okay. They very much need the salvation only He can provide. Like God, the church should desire that all people will turn to Jesus Christ and put their trust in Him. We are here to encourage folks to do just that.

However, making disciples includes more than just encouraging people to become Christians. The Great Commission includes baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything the Lord has commanded us to do. That

means, number four, we are here to help Christians grow in their faith. We are to help those of you who are a part of this congregation to become people God has called you to be. Teaching Christians to obey what the Lord has commended basically means teaching the Bible. That is why Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and youth group are a big part of what we do. That is why most sermons are devoted to teaching what the Bible says and what it means for us. Whenever someone becomes a Christian, professes faith in Jesus Christ, it is the churches job to help that new believer grow to maturity. We do that by teaching that individual to obey all the commands and promises the Lord has given to us. That is why we are here. To help Christians grow in their faith in Christ.

Friends, these are four dimensions of the purpose of Chisholm Baptist Church. I believe a good church keeps all four of these in balance. I know some pastors say, "Well our church focuses on evangelism or emphasizes worship, and we let other churches specialize on something else." I don't know if that is healthy. I believe these four purposes are like four wheels on a car. If one tire is flat, the car doesn't drive very well. God has called Chisholm Baptist Church to be a full-service church. And that means if you are involved in one aspect of this ministry, please don't forget that the other three are just as important. The choir and the missions committee both play important roles in this church. Many church conflicts would be avoided if folks would remember that both the ministries in which they are involved, and the ministry in which they are not involved are important.

So, friends, that is why we are here. This is what Chisholm Baptist Church is about. We are not about a building or a new parking lot, we are not about taking in money, we are not a social club, or a social service agency. We are here to glorify God, by expressing love for Him, love for other people, proclaiming the gospel, and helping people grow as followers of Jesus Christ. Anything else we do is at best secondary. The clearer that is in our minds, the more we help other people to understand this, the better by God's grace, Chisholm Baptist Church will make a difference in our world, for His glory.