

New Year's Message

Why Are We Here?

Acts 2:42-47

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Why Are We Here?

Scripture

The Romans celebrated January 1st as a general holiday. Sacrifices were made to the two-faced god, Janus, who was able to look both ways at once. Janus symbolized change and transition, such as the progression of the past to the future. January 1st was a holiday on which gifts and visits were exchanged, feasting and revelry took place, in addition to the sacrifices that were made to the god Janus.

Participation in these pagan sacrifices was of course discouraged by the Christian Church. Rather, Christians were expected to spend this time, both January 1st and December 31st, in quiet meditation, reading of Scripture, and acts of charity.¹

So, as we make a transition from 2006 to 2007, I would like us to pause to consider the question, "Why are we here?" In order to answer that question, I would like to show you a picture of the 1st century Church as it is described for us in Acts 2:42-47.

So, with that in mind, let us read Acts 2:42-47:

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

¹ Lloyd Merle Perry, *A Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 181.

Introduction

Someone once said, “The two greatest days in a person’s life are the day he was born and the day he finds out why he was born.”²

Most of us don’t recall the day we were born. However, that day obviously took place; otherwise, we would not be here.

Unfortunately, many of us don’t recall the day we found out *why* we were born. Many people still don’t know why we are here. And that is a pity. John Calvin actually puts it even stronger when he said, “All who are ignorant of the purpose for which they live are fools and madmen.”³

Thomas Carlyle said that “the man without purpose is like a ship without a rudder.”⁴ If you don’t know your purpose in life, you will wander aimlessly through life. You will simply exist from one meal to the next, and from one day to the next.

When God saved us I suppose he could have taken us immediately to be with him in heaven for all eternity. But he did not. He left us here on earth. And he left us here for a purpose.

Lesson

I would like to suggest that we are here for five purposes. These purposes are illustrated throughout the pages of Scripture, but I will simply draw your attention to a picture of the 1st century Church described in Acts 2:42-47. These purposes are:

1. We were formed for God’s family,
2. We were created to become like Christ,
3. We were shaped for serving God,
4. We were made for a mission, and
5. We were planned for God’s pleasure.⁵

² John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 518.

³ Blanchard, 518.

⁴ Blanchard, 518.

⁵ Taken from Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2002).

I. We Were Formed for God's Family (2:42, 43, 46b)

First, we were formed for God's family.

Notice that the 1st century Christians were **devoted to the fellowship** (2:42). That means just what it says: they were committed, dedicated, faithful, and loyal to their new Christian family.

Furthermore, **all the believers were together** (2:44). They spent a lot of time with one another. **They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts** (2:46b).

Every Christian ought to be a member of a true Christian church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Church of Ephesus and said, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). I want to highlight several important key truths from this text of Scripture.

First, the church is a family. Paul says that that Christians are "members of God's household." That is, Christians are members of God's family. The church is a spiritual family. In fact, your spiritual family is going to outlast your physical family. The Bible says there isn't marriage in heaven but there are Christians in heaven. So we're all going to be related in heaven—together—and this spiritual family will actually outlast the blood family that you have here on earth.

Second, God expects you and me to be a member of a family. Notice Paul says, "Consequently, you *are*. . . fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." Membership in God's family is not optional. Every Christian needs a church family. A Christian without a church family is like a person who says, "I want to play NFL football but I don't want to be a part of any team," or, "I want to be in the army but not serve in any platoon," or, "I want to be a bee but I don't want to be a part of the hive," or, "I want to play an instrument but not be in an orchestra." The fact is that we need each other in order to grow as Christians.

You need to understand when the word “church” is used in the Bible, it is used two different ways. First, it is used to refer to every Christian who has ever lived throughout history. That’s called the universal church. Every Christian all around the world, regardless of denominational label, is a member of the universal church.

But the other way the word “church” is used is to refer to a local group in a specific place. Like the church at Corinth, the church that met in Lydia’s home, the church that was on the hill, or like the church here at Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. It is used in a local sense.

The word “church” is used only four times in the Bible to refer to a general universal sense. Almost every time you see the word “church” in the Bible, it is used to refer to a specific group of Christians in a local church, like we are here today.

Once you became a Christian you are automatically a part of the universal church of God. But you don’t become a member of a local church until you make that choice. It’s like when you were born physically, you were automatically entered into the human race. You didn’t have a choice. You became a part of the human race the moment you were born. But you didn’t become a part of any local family until somebody chose to take you home from the hospital.

That’s what we’re talking about here. You need to be a part of a local church family.

Rick Warren said that he had a woman tell him one time, “I don’t need to be a part of any local church. I’m a part of the invisible church.”

“That’s great!” said Pastor Warren. “And when you get sick, and you are in the hospital, who visits you? The invisible pastor?”

You need somebody in the flesh. There are over thirty commands in the Bible you cannot obey, you cannot follow, unless you are a member of a local church and say, “That is going to be my church family.”

Third, a Christian without a church family is an orphan. Paul says that Christians are “members of God’s household.” As I said, God has given us at least thirty instructions in the New Testament that you cannot fulfill unless you are a member of a local church.

Only in America do we have “floating” believers. These are people who every week pop around to a different church. “This week let’s go to First Baptist. Next week we’ll go to First Methodist. After that we will go to First Lutheran. And then we want to try First Presbyterian.” They float around each week to a different church.

The Bible says that if you are a Christian, you are to be an active, participating member of a local church. You could be the hand, the ear, the eyes, the nose, the liver. What would you say if the liver said, “I think for one week I’ll be a part of this body over here and the next week I’ll be a part of that body over there and the week after that I’ll be a part of this body over here.” Pretty soon what’s going to happen is an unconnected liver shrivels up and dies. You need to be a part of a local church family.

What’s the difference between being a Christian and being a member of a church family? The difference is the word “commitment.” I become a Christian by committing my life to Christ. I become a member of a local church by committing myself to other Christians. I say, “That’s going to be my church home where I’m going to give and be given to, where I’m going to serve and be served, where I’ll love and be loved.”

So, the first point to notice is that we were formed for God’s family. This is true for all Christians and not just for some Christians.

II. We Were Created to Become Like Christ (2:42)

Second, we were created to become like Christ.

Bishop J. C. Ryle, the great Anglican Bishop of Liverpool in the 19th century, said, “As the soldier follows his general, as the servant follows his master, as the scholar follows his teacher, as

the sheep follows its shepherd, just so ought the professing Christian to follow Christ.”⁶

God has not left us to wonder what a mature Christian looks like. A mature Christian looks more and more like Christ. And how do we mature in Christlikeness? We do so through God’s word. We read that the 1st century Church **devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching** (2:42). And that is our purpose too. We also are to devote ourselves to the study of God’s word so that we become more and more like Christ.

I wonder how many of you have read through the entire Bible? I know you may read portions of it. You do so at least each week in worship. But, have you ever read through God’s word in a systematic, regular, disciplined way?

Every Christian ought to read God’s word regularly. Let me urge you to make a commitment this coming year to read God’s word. There are a number of different reading guides that you can download off the internet. Or, if you like, I will be glad to give you one.

The point is that since you have been created to become like Christ, the only way you can have a blueprint for what that looks like is by reading his word.

III. We Were Shaped for Serving God (2:45)

Third, we were shaped for serving God.

Someone has said, “No man’s life is for his private use.”⁷

God has given every Christian at least one spiritual gift (and probably a cluster of similar gifts) in order to serve God’s people. This purpose is illustrated in the 1st century Church where we see Christians **selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need** (2:45). God has given many gifts to his Church, and we are responsible to discover and use the gifts for which God has shaped us.

⁶ Blanchard, 149.

⁷ Blanchard, 580.

Arnold Glasgow said, “Make your life a mission—not an intermission.”⁸ Your life should be given in the service of God. You should not sit around waiting for the day you meet Christ.

Too many people only go to worship services. They do not think that they have any responsibility to serve God in his church. As Vance Havner said, “Too many are willing to sit at God’s table, but not work in his field.”⁹

As you enter 2007, make a commitment to find a place of service in God’s church. If you don’t know how God has shaped you for service, don’t worry about that. Just begin serving, and as you serve, you will discover your spiritual gifts.

IV. We Were Made for a Mission (2:47)

Fourth, we were made for a mission.

The 1st century Church lived out the purposes for which God had made them. And as a result, **the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:47)**. God has made us to know him and to make him known to a lost and dying world.

Jesus described his own mission on one occasion as a mission to reach the lost. He said in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

One of the dangers facing every local church is that it will become unbalanced. Most PCA churches probably face the danger of becoming unbalanced in emphasizing discipleship over evangelism. This is a subtle emphasis that creeps into the life of a church without anyone even noticing. It reminds me of the “Parable of the Lifesaving Station” that I first heard from a professor at Seminary:

On a dangerous seacoast notorious for shipwrecks, there was a crude little lifesaving station. Actually, the station was merely a hut with only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the turbulent sea. With little thought for themselves, they

⁸ Blanchard, 581.

⁹ Blanchard, 581.

would go out day and night tirelessly searching for those in danger as well as the lost. Many, many lives were saved by this band of men who faithfully worked as a team in and out of the lifesaving station. By and by, it became a famous place.

Some of those who had been saved as well as others along the seacoast wanted to become associated with this little station. They were willing to give their time and energy and money in support of its objectives. New boats were purchased. New crews were trained. The station that was once obscure and crude and virtually insignificant began to grow.

Some of its members were unhappy that the hut was so unattractive and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided. Emergency cots were replaced with lovely furniture. Rough, hand-made equipment was discarded and had to be torn down to make rooms for all the additional equipment, furniture, systems, and appointments.

By its completion, the lifesaving station had become a popular gathering place, and its objectives had begun to shift. It was now used as sort of a clubhouse, an attractive building for public gatherings. Saving lives, feeding the hungry, strengthening the fearful, and calming the disturbed rarely occurred now.

Fewer members were now interested in braving the sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired professional lifeboat crews to do this work. The original goal of the station wasn't altogether forgotten, however. The lifesaving motifs still prevailed in the club's decorations. In fact, there was a liturgical lifeboat preserved in the *Room of Sweet Memories* with soft, indirect lighting, which helped hide the layer of dust upon the once-used vessel.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the boat crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty, some terribly sick and lonely. Others were ethnically "different" from the majority of the club members. The beautiful new club suddenly became messy and cluttered. A special committee saw to it that a shower house was immediately built *outside* and *away from* the club so shipwreck victims could be cleaned up *before* coming inside.

At the next meeting there were strong words and angry feelings, which resulted in a division among the members. Most of the people wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities and all involvement with shipwreck victims. "It's too unpleasant, it's a hindrance to our social life, and it's opening the door to folks who are not *our kind!*"

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As you would expect, some still insisted upon saving lives, that this was their primary mission, that their only reason for existence was ministering to *anyone* needing help regardless of their club's beauty or size or decorations.

They were voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast! They did.

As the years passed, the new station experienced the same old changes. It evolved into another club. . . and yet another lifesaving station was begun.

History continued to repeat itself. And if you visit that coast today, you'll find a large number of exclusive, impressive clubs along the shoreline owned and operated by slick professionals who have lost all involvement with the saving of lives.

Shipwrecks still occur in those waters, but now most of the victims are not saved. Every day they drown at sea, and so few seem to care, so very few.

Brothers and sisters, Christ cares. Christ cares about the lost. And you and I were made for a mission. We were made to know Christ and to make him known.

V. We Were Planned for God's Pleasure (2:42, 47a)

And finally, we were planned for God's pleasure.

In a very real sense, this is our ultimate and supreme purpose. "Man's chief end [or purpose] is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever," as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says.

The 1st century Church was **devoted to the breaking of bread and to prayer** (2:42). Moreover, they were **praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people** (2:47a). Here is a glimpse of God's people glorifying and magnifying him, because they understood that we were planned for God's pleasure. And it is in pleasing God that we find true satisfaction in our souls.

John Piper put it this way: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, and we are most satisfied in him in

worship.”¹⁰ That is a wonderful statement! Think about it for a moment. When we are truly delighted and satisfied in God, he is glorified. And we find most satisfaction in God when we are worshipping him.

God has planned us for his pleasure. The reason any one of us exists is to please God. I want to encourage you to find ways to grow in worshipping God.

Think about worship as taking place in private and also in public. Your private worship is that worship that takes place between you and the Lord. It is that daily time that you set aside to read God’s word, to pray to him, and to adore him for who is.

Your public worship is that worship that takes place each Lord’s Day. It is what we do when we come together each week to ascribe worth to God.

When you come to public worship, do come prepared. You are coming to meet with the King of kings, and Lord of lords. You are coming to the One who has created you, and then recreated you in his Son. You should arrive on time and think about all that you do in worship.

Conclusion

So, as we begin 2007, remember why we are here. We are here for five purposes:

1. We were formed for God’s family,
2. We were created to become like Christ,
3. We were shaped for serving God,
4. We were made for a mission, and
5. We were planned for God’s pleasure.

May 2007 be a wonderful, Christ-filled, God-honoring, and purposeful year for each one of you. Amen.

¹⁰ Blanchard, 684.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
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PRAAYER:

Our Father, we thank you for 2006, and we look forward with anticipation to 2007. Help us to remember that we were formed for God's family, created to become like Christ, shaped for serving God, made for a mission, and planned for God's pleasure.

We want to live our lives on purpose for you. Help us to do so.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Have a Happy New Year tomorrow! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.