

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 9-7-14 AM NOTES
"THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#1 in Series, "The Making, Maturing, and Mobilizing of Disciples"

"Let angels sing for sinners repenting, prodigals restored, backsliders reclaimed, Satan's captives released, blind eyes opened, broken hearts bound up, the despondent cheered, the self-righteous stripped, the formalist driven from a refuge of lies, the ignorant enlightened, and saints built up in their holy faith. I ask great things of a great God."
—*Valley of Vision*

Psalms 37:4 (NKJV) "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart."

I. The Pronouncement of the Mission

Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV) "18 And Jesus came 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

First Baptist Church exists to glorify God by making disciples who are connecting with God through worship, growing with others through small groups, serving others through ministry, and sharing the gospel here and around the world.

II. The Product of the Mission

Revelation 3:19 (HCSB) "As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed and repent."

A disciple is one who has repented of sin and savingly believed on Christ and has brought all of life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is following Him so closely that he is being conformed to His likeness.

Luke 9:23 (NKJV) "Then He said to *them* all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"

A. Deny Yourself (Luke 9:23a)

"A crucified Savior will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people." —J. C. Ryle

1 Corinthians 15:31b (NKJV) "... I die daily."

B. Daily Take Up Your Cross (Luke 9:23b)

C. Daily Follow Jesus (Luke 9:23c)

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As we begin what I think may perhaps be the most important series of messages I have ever preached (I tend to say that about every new series I start), I want to share a prayer with you from one of my most useful tools in prayer: *The Valley of Vision – A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*. This prayer is putting eloquently and biblically in words the prayer of my heart for this church. “Let angels sing for sinners repenting, prodigals restored, backsliders reclaimed, Satan’s captives released, blind eyes opened, broken hearts bound up, the despondent cheered, the self-righteous stripped, the formalist [people going through religious rituals with no heart reality] driven from a refuge of lies, the ignorant enlightened, and saints built up in their holy faith. I ask great things of a great God.” [Page 9].

Before we begin the message proper, I ask that you would allow me a few minutes of personal information. I was quite surprised a while back when one of our Pastors said in a meeting that one of the questions he is asked most is, “When is Pastor Phil going to retire?” There are several ways I could take that question! I have sought the Lord and what I am going to share is what I believe He is leading me to do. I am saying, “Don’t hold me to this because God doesn’t always clearly reveal the details of His will for our future.” I may be off on this because it does not involve a clear promise from God’s perfect Word. This is what I sense as God’s plan. I turn 65 in a few more weeks. I am not compelled financially to continue being employed by the church. This church has been good to us and I have a retirement plan that would be enough for us to live on – we have no debts and we are not “high livers”. As best as I can discern, I am delighting myself in the Lord and based on Psalm 37:4, I believe that He is the source of my heart desires. **Psalms 37:4 (NKJV)** “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” I have no desire to retire. By God’s grace my health is excellent and I have a greater passion to see this church fulfill its mission than any other time in my 28 plus years here. Also, when it is God’s time for me to step down, I want to do so in an orderly way that will glorify God and provide a smooth transition to the preacher who will replace me. I have seen disasters happen when a Pastor with a long tenure retires and then the church sets out to find someone. Here is what I am sensing from the Lord (it may change). In about 5 or 6 more years, would like for the church to start searching for the next preaching Elder that He has for FBC. If it is a typical situation, that would take possibly a year. The Elders (hopefully by that time there would be at least as many non-staff elders as staff elders) would be heavily involved in the process of finding God’s man for that time. One of the advantages of an Elder led form of church government is that it is more conducive to continuing the same core values than a Pastor led or Deacon led church. When we find and call the man who we believe is God’s choice for the next preaching Elder, I would continue to serve for another year with the new preacher with a gradual giving over the preaching responsibilities to my successor. At the end of that one year or so period, I would step out of the way and go into the next phase of kingdom labor that the Lord has at that time for me and Kathy – hopefully it will have something to do with international missions, especially with unreached people groups. The Lord knows that we are ready to go to the mission field today if that is what God wills, but we have not sensed that is what He desires for us and no doors have opened up for that. If the other Elders feel that I should leave before that, I will submit to their authority. Here is the bottom line: I will likely (if God wills) be the Elder for preaching and leadership and vision at First Baptist Powell for the next 5-7 years. Remember, that is not a promise or a commitment, but it is based on my current understanding of God’s will. I feel that it is important that you know that and that we have an atmosphere where rumors cannot take root and cause harm. If I sense any change, I will let you know.

Over the next 6-8 weeks I want us to re-focus on the mission of FBC. The mission isn't changing, but I feel that I haven't talked about it and held it before you enough over that last few years. Over the years that I have been a Pastor, I have found that it is much easier to get a church excited and involved in a special project or program than it is to get them excited about the never changing mission of the church. Some of you can remember when we built this building and how God provided for us to move in debt-free. There was a constant buzz and excitement that we had never experienced before [remember the giants that we knocked down under the big tent at the ground breaking]. I warned in more than one message that when we got moved there would be a giant let-down unless we refocused on the mission. In spite of the warnings, there was a giant let down and a rough year after we moved in. I remember a man in the church (no longer here) who expressed with great frustration something like this to one of the Pastors, "So what do we do now? We don't have anything exciting in front of us"? I have sensed that same spiritual malaise over the last few years. I believe the reason why is that we have lost our focus on the mission.

For clarification purposes, let me explain the difference between the church's mission and vision. The church's mission never changes; the vision changes often. The mission relates to why we exist as a church. The vision is more specific and can usually be measured. I am not speaking of a vision in the sense of being in a trance and having a mystical experience. I am speaking of a leading by God to surrendered, delighting in the Lord leaders. They become convinced that this is what God is doing and they simply jump on board with what God is doing. To use the example I used earlier, in the mid 1990's we were growing and there was no space. We had 3 full AM worship services and the Sunday PM Service was so full that we had an overflow in the fellowship hall where adult Sunday School classes were assigned a week each month to be in the overflow so that we could get everybody in. The vision was a new worship center with education space beneath it that we would pay cash for. Another example of vision was the beginning of First Baptist Academy. Someone defined vision this way: "Vision is seeing it before you see it in order to see it." Let me explain that. Vision is when church leaders began to visualize what they believe God desires to accomplish for His glory through His church. They then cast that vision to the people and the people begin to see the completed vision by faith because they are convinced that it is God's will for that time. Because the vision was seen by leaders and by the people the vision comes to pass and is literally seen in God's time and God gets all the glory for what He has done. We will be focusing on vision in the first part of next year, but we must focus on the mission first. Vision that is not grounded in the unchanging mission will eventually lead the church off course and cause it to accomplish good things that rob it of the best thing – the mission. However, when the mission is foundational, vision is always focused on accomplishing the best thing! When we are grounded in the mission God has for His church we will regularly see God accomplishing what we prayed for at the beginning of this message – sinners repenting, prodigals restored, backsliders reclaimed, Satan's captives released, blind eyes opened, broken hearts bound up, the despondent cheered, the self-righteous stripped, the formalist driven from a refuge of lies, the ignorant enlightened, and saints built up in their holy faith.

With that long introduction, let's re-focus on the mission for the church.

I. The Pronouncement of the Mission

Let's get real basic and make sure that we know what the word "mission" means. It is very important that we define it because it isn't a word that appears in the New Testament. At its most basic level, mission implies two things. First it implies being sent. The word mission comes from a Latin word (*mittere*) that means "to send". Second, mission implies being given a task. We are sent to do something. I used to like to watch the old TV show, "Mission: Impossible". When Mr. Phelps was given a mission, it always involved going somewhere to do a specific thing. For the church, the mission is that specific thing that leads us to pour out our resources and indeed our lives to accomplish. The Biblical statement of our mission is in what is called "The Great Commission". There is a version of the commission in all 4 Gospels and in the book of Acts but the best known statement of the commission is in **Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)** ¹⁸ And Jesus came 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 of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” This commission and the 4 other varieties of it are the marching orders for the church. From that biblical mandate, we have a mission statement that personalizes it for our church without changing any of the meaning or urgency of the biblical statement in Matthew 28:18-20. The mission statement of First Baptist Church is this: **First Baptist Church exists to glorify God by making disciples who are connecting with God through worship, growing with others through small groups, serving others through ministry, and sharing the gospel here and around the world.** The short version of the mission is that FBC exists to glorify God by making disciples.

We need to understand that there are a lot of good things that the church **can** do, but they must never become the primary focus or mission of the church. It is good to work to stop the moral decline and secularization of our nation (we do that – example Amendment One to regulate abortion since the Supreme Court of the United States has ruled that it cannot be eliminated), to help fight poverty, to stop human trafficking, to seek renewal for the inner city, and a host of other worthy causes, but none of those are our primary mission. We can be involved in any of those while we are carrying out the mission, and some of them can even be avenues through which the mission is carried out, but they are not the mission. When we take the eternal perspective, how ultimately important is electing people who will turn our nation back to the foundation our Founding Fathers established it on, how ultimately important is the temporary relief of poverty, stopping human trafficking, or providing jobs for the poor? All of those certainly have great value, but the good news that proclaims Christ’s substitutionary death for sin and His resurrection from the dead and the fact that all who repent of sin and savingly believe on Him will be saved and made a new creation in Christ and spend eternity in heaven instead of hell can make an eternal change in a person’s life. Thus the disciple making Gospel must never be neglected in order to change the people in political office or to help alleviate temporary human suffering. However, hurting people and a nation that has left its foundations are not to be ignored. Again, it is not an “either / or” approach, it is a “both / and” approach, but the making of disciples is always the priority because heaven and hell are real and truly Jesus does save!

Let’s look more closely at the mission as it is summarized in the Great Commission. There are four verbs in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) – one main verb and 3 supporting participles. The main verb is the command to “make disciples”. Jesus’ followers are to make disciples from all people groups (all ethnic groups and all cultural-linguistic groups). The three participles enlarge on what is involved in making disciples. *We go, baptize, and teach.* Going implies being sent. Baptizing (applying what we are told later in the New Testament) professes repentance, cleansing from sin, union with Christ as well as being a part of Christ’s church. Teaching tells us that Jesus was speaking of more than initial evangelism. Discipleship begins at salvation but it doesn’t stop there. Discipleship is a process that moves us toward being conformed to Christ’s likeness. All of this is possible because Jesus is with us as we are going to difficult places and talking to difficult people.

If we had time to go through all of the commissions in the other three Gospels and the book of Acts, we would see that the mission of the church is to go in the power of the Holy Spirit into the world starting in your own neighborhood and extending to the furthest nations to make disciples of Christ, baptizing them and gathering them into churches where they are connecting with God through worship, growing with others through small groups, serving others through ministry, and sharing the gospel wherever they go. I just gave you our mission statement!

II. The Product of the Mission

The product of the mission is disciples of Jesus Christ. Exactly what is a disciple? What follows will sound radical and unreasonable to some who haven’t been in a Bible teaching church. Please check out everything I say by Scripture. What much of the church has done is to make the disciple Jesus describes in the Gospels a “second level Christian”. This prominent **false teaching** says or at least implies that you

become a Christian by inviting Jesus into your heart. When you say “the sinner’s prayer” you are in; you are forgiven and going to heaven when you die. You should be baptized, but according to this 2 level view of Christianity, it isn’t really necessary for 1st level Christians. After you have gotten in (a first level Christian), then you face an option. You can continue on as a first level Christian – not really serious about Christ, not necessarily in church (except maybe Christmas and Easter), not in the word at all, and really no different than a non-Christian, **or** you can become a disciple like those Jesus talked about in the Gospels that were pretty hard core Christians. The disciple that Jesus talked about is seen as a second level fanatical Christian in this false view. Not many go to that second level here in America.

What is wrong with this “two level” view of Christianity? It just isn’t in the Bible! Those in the first level that I just described are deceived and are not Christians at all. There is no Biblical evidence that some Christians are not disciples. There is a temporary state of disciples who are disobedient that is called carnality, but that is only a temporary condition; it is not a permanent category. God disciplines His carnal or fleshly children so that they don’t stay in that state. **Revelation 3:19 (HCSB)** “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed and repent.” If a person belongs to the Lord, they can’t continue in that flesh controlled state. There are no contradictions between what Jesus taught about becoming His disciple and what the rest of the New Testament says about Christians.

Let’s look at exactly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. A disciple is one who has repented of sin and savingly believed on Christ and has brought all of life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is following Him so closely that he is being conformed to His likeness. The call to discipleship is the same for all. There is no call for the ones who only want to go to heaven when they die and another call for those who are really serious and radical about following Him. There is only one call! I believe that the call to each disciple is best summarized in **Luke 9:23 (NKJV)** “Then He said to *them* all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” A disciple is one who comes after (follows hard after) Jesus. What does that involve?

A. Deny Yourself (V23a)

The word “deny” is in a tense that designates something that happens at a point in time. In other words it is not “slowly wean yourself”, or “over a period of time reach a state of having denied yourself”. Daily we are to deny ourselves. The word translated “deny” means to put away, to refuse, to give up oneself. This denial means that we vacate the throne of our lives; we say “no” to self-centeredness; we set aside our own will. Dr. J. C. Ryle said, “A crucified Savior will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people” [J. C. Ryle, “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Volume 2”, Page 310]. The apostle Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:31b (NKJV)** “I die daily.” We are to deny our rebel wills, our carnal longings, our Christless ambitions, our self-generated plans, our obsession with controlling our own life, and our lust for comfort and ease. I believe these three commands in verse 23 are sequential. You cannot follow Jesus until you have taken up your cross and you can’t take up your cross until you have denied yourself. People who have not denied themselves are concerned with playing it safe when it comes to following Christ. They want to be in control of their lives and they are not comfortable when they are not in control and have to trust God alone. To be His disciple, you must daily deny yourself.

B. Daily Take up Your Cross (V23b)

The picture here is a condemned person taking up his own cross carrying it to the place of his execution. To take up your cross is to confess that the old you that was under the dominion of sin has been crucified with Christ. To take up your cross is to confess that by God’s enabling you are accepting the suffering, the pain, the rejection, the persecution that comes with following Christ. We realize that our pain will be as nothing compared to His, but it is our asserting that whatever happens, we trust Him and we have already settled the fact that we are willing to pay the price. When we find that following him involves a great sacrifice, we don’t have to debate, agonize, or vacillate; we have already taken up our cross – in fact we do it daily.

C. Daily Follow Jesus (V23c)

The call to follow Jesus is a call to surrender to his Lordship. The tense is to keep following Him – every day, 365 days a year, every year of your life. True discipleship is not just a door to be entered; it is a path to be followed. To follow Him assumes that we 100% surrender to His Lordship. It means that our lives are a signed check to our Lord with the amount left to be filled in by Him.

CONCLUSION

Our mission is to make disciples. As we are fulfilling that mission, we minister to the hurting, fight human trafficking, and seek to bring our nation back to God, but nothing – even really good things – must be allowed to divert us from being and making disciples.