

PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

From John Mac Arthur's Matthew 28:6-20 Sermon

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So many people do not understand the mission of the church. They apparently don't even think about it. They seemingly show up to church whenever it is convenient or even show up frequently to enjoy all that is provided for them, to take whatever they feel like taking, and to leave whatever they feel like leaving. They seem to want to be involved in the church to the degree that it serves or meets particular needs in their own lives.

Now if we were to survey people in the church and ask them what they felt the primary purpose of the church was, we might get some answers like: the purpose of the church is **fellowship**. The church is a place to make friends with good people, honest people, godly people who strengthen your life. It's a place to provide activity for the family, enjoyable activity, meaningful activity. It's a place to enjoy the best of music and recreation and to cultivate relationships. It's a place where love is cultivated and shared.

Others may say that the mission of the church is **teaching**, that the primary objective of the church is to put out doctrine, to strengthen believers, to articulate theology, to give principles for practical Christian living, to train people for various responsibilities in the church, to instruct children and young people in obedience to the law of God with an objective of bringing them to maturity in Christ.

Even others may suggest that the real purpose of the church is to **give praise** to God, that the church is really a praising community, a community of people who exalt God for who He is and what He has done. This is the central activity of heaven: praise, adoration, honor, reverence, awe, and homage being given eternally by all the redeemed saints.

It is true that fellowship and teaching and praise are absolutely essential in the church. But none of them and not all of them in combination are the mission or purpose or goal or objective of the church. None of them is why we are here.

So what is the motive of the church? The primary greatest single unified motive of the church is the glory of God. Christ came onto the world with one motive, basically, and that was to glorify God. And that motive has been passed to the church. We are to give God glory; that is our reason for being.

But what is the mission that flows out of that motive? It glorifies God when sinners are saved. God's desire was always to glorify Himself by reaching the lost around the world. Every time you bring someone to Christ, you add another person who can now be to the praise of His glory. The mission that glorifies God is to win men and women to the Savior. And as they come to know Him and their sins are forgiven, and they are transformed from death to life and darkness to light, God is glorified in the miracle of that transformation.

Now here is the point. The person who desires to glorify God, who wants to honor God's will and God's purpose and God's desire, must then love the lost world the way God loves the lost world and give his life for the sake of winning that lost world. That is the pattern. God loved a lost world and sought to win it to Himself for His own glory. Christ came into the world, loved a lost world and sought to win it to Himself for the Father's glory. The disciples were sent into

the world to love the lost world, to seek to win the lost world for the glory of God the Father. Our mission is the same mission. This is precisely the mission of the church. We are an extension of the ministry of God the Father.

Jesus said and the Scriptures indicate that the only reason we're here on earth is to reach the lost, every other purpose (as fellowship, training and praise) could be better accomplished in heaven. If God wanted perfect fellowship, knowledge and praise with His Son, He would have kept Him in heaven. If God wanted us to have perfect fellowship with Him, knowledge of Him and praise to Him, He should take us to heaven where there will be no distractions. But if God wanted to redeem fallen men, He had to send Christ to this earth, and if our purpose is to seek and save those who are lost, we have to be left on earth.

Fellowship, teaching, praise are not the mission of the church, but they are part of the preparation and training for the mission of saving the lost. The passage we are studying here in Matthew 28 is called "The Great Commission" and in verse 19 it says "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." The word disciple means to be a learner or follower, not just a believer. So our mission as Christians is to make learning believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

Now, if we're going to make disciples of all nations, if we're going to reach the world, what is necessary? What is necessary for effective evangelism? Let's look at five explicit or implicit elements which are essential to effective fulfillment of the purpose for which the church exists: **availability, worship, submission, obedience, power.**

The first three necessary elements to be a disciple maker are attitudes. It is the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission that say: whatever He commands, I will do. Someone once said, "The greatest ability is **availability.**" It doesn't matter how talented you are if you're not available. Your time, talent, gifts, finances, and resources are all set in availability before the Lord to be used as He would desire for the purpose which He has called you to fulfill. Are you available? Are you willing to say no to whatever you possess and whatever time you think is yours if the Lord says it's His?

The second prerequisite or element in fulfilling this commission to make disciples is the attitude of **worship.** This is a question of focus. A true worshipper gets his focus right. A worshipping life means a Christ-centered life, a life that is yielded to the Spirit of God, a life controlled by the Holy Spirit, a life centered on the Word of God, a life cleansed from sin. When we worship the Lord Jesus Christ, He is all in all, He fills our thought and our intent every day. So, where is your focus?

The next element is the attitude of **submission.** In verse 18, Jesus said, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth." He meant, "I'm in control." The word "authority" essentially means the freedom to do whatever you wish. Jesus Christ with all authority is free to do what He wants when He wants where He wants with what He wants to whomever He wants. That's the essence of sovereign authority. If He's in charge, we better listen, we better respond.

Our fourth element in fulfilling the commission to make disciples is **obedience.** Jesus is our Lord and Savior; He and God the father are one. He deserves our obedience to His commands. It may seem unnatural or impossible to you, but to "make disciples of all nations" was commanded. In verse 19 He tells us how to be obedient: **go, baptize, and teach.** So first we have to **go** to the people who are lost; we can't wait for them to come to us. Next, **baptizing,** which means to immerse or dip in water, is an outward sign symbolizing what the new believer believes in his heart. It is a visible public confession of the believer's acceptance of Christ's

death, burial, and resurrection. The truly converted person has a hunger for the truth of God and for the Word of God and is willing to learn, so the burden is ours to **teach** them whatever Christ commanded. It's not only a converting ministry that we're called to but it's a teaching ministry. What we are to teach is the words and commands of Christ and what He taught the disciples.

Our fifth and last element in fulfilling the commission to make disciples is the **power** of God. Without God's power the first four elements would not mean a thing. It would not matter that I was available, or had a worshipping heart, or that I was submissive, or wanted to be obedient, because I couldn't do it in my own strength. Remember, God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. He is the awesome creator of the heavens and earth and all that is in them. As a Christian, God is always with us and the promise of power comes in the promise of presence. Through the Holy Spirit, our Lord is with us. He is in us, and He is empowering us. The Scripture states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

John Mac Arthur states that now "I understand that what God wants out of me is availability. What He wants from me is a worshipping heart that's totally centered on Him and not the junk of the world. What He wants is a submissive spirit that says, 'Whatever You ask, Lord, I'll do it.' And then when I hear it, He wants obedience. And what He gives me in return is not only all the commands and all the orders and all the right instruction, but the power of His own presence to pull it off and make it happen.

In every church, there are many members which make up the body of the church. Each member has different talents, gifts and abilities. The church should use their members collectively to accomplish their mission. As a member of a church, you don't have to be the one who goes or teaches. You can support your church and help reach the lost with the gospel through your gifts, prayers, and service. Just make sure your church has a mission to reach the lost.

The tragedy of the church of Jesus Christ is that so many people have lost sight of Jesus' great commission and they have settled for a comfortable self-indulgent kind of Christianity that is little more than an inexpensive social club membership. That is not God's intention. People are preoccupied with that which is absolutely useless. Their time, thoughts, energies, and money go for all the junk imaginable. We are crippled by the indulgent mentality of a self-centered society into which most Christians have bought. We have misplaced priorities. If you want to know where your priorities are look at your checkbook, credit card receipts, and your calendar. In the church we are great at fellowship, teaching and praise, but we're sure not so good at sacrificial living and sacrificial giving to reach the lost. So when you evaluate your Christian commitment and you evaluate how you're using your Christian life, ask yourself: am I involved in winning lost men and women to Jesus Christ? Is that where my time and energy and effort and talent and money is going?

Christ came into the world to give His life to win people to Himself, so you are in the world to give your life to win people to Him as well. And you've got to count the cost and be willing for the grace of God and the glory of God to pay that cost and for the joy that is set before you to give all you have for that purpose.