

The Lens of Purpose Defines Practice Matthew 28:18-20

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

Introduction

This morning we are beginning a series where we are going to consider how we look at things, sometimes known as our worldview, as we reflect on how we view different areas of church life

This is a vital topic for the church to explore because our worldview motivates us and in many ways controls our behavior and our decisions

And the fact that people see things differently accounts for most of the disagreements we see all around us not only in the church although that will be our focus

I'm sure most of you have heard about the group of blind men who encountered an elephant and not knowing what it was endeavored to discover what they could by touching it

The first man touched the elephant on the **trunk** and determined an elephant is like a **snake**

The second man who touched its **ear** decided the elephant was like a **fan**

The third man who encountered a **leg** said the elephant was like a **tree**

While the fourth man who ran his hand along the elephant's **side** believed the elephant to be like a **wall**

The fifth man took ahold of the elephant's **tail** and described it as a **rope**

While the last man who felt its **tusk** stated an elephant is smooth, hard, and pointed like a **spear**

Each of the men was accurate as far as he knew but each of them was wrong because he "saw" wrongly and incompletely and their false views caused them to come to blows

And it took the sighted man riding the elephant to help them coordinate their views so that they could understand the elephant correctly and make peace with one another

So often we in the church are just like those blind men as we so firmly believe we see things clearly that we can hardly conceive of the fact that we might just be seeing wrongly or incompletely and that **our behaviors that result from our faulty perspectives are also wrong**

Many of you, like me, wear corrective lenses of some type – either glasses or contact lenses and some of you have even had surgery on your eyes to correct your vision

Those of you who have been to an eye doctor are familiar with the methodology the doctor uses to determine the state of your eyes

How they have you look at a chart through a big contraption with all kinds of dials and levers and lenses and how they repeatedly flip back and forth between different options asking, "Is this better or worse than this?"

We know that the goal of looking through the different lenses is to bring our vision into conformance with the proper standard so that our vision is corrected and we see things as they truly are

As Christ-followers we believe that the Bible shows us the truth about our world We see this stated in **Psalm 119:160** – "The sum of you word is truth..."

And again in **John 17:17** – "...your word is truth"

So it should follow if we can discover what the Bible has to say about a particular subject we should know what is true and so possess a biblical worldview which should then result in actions that conform to God's will

My goal then through this series will be to take on several different issues that are prevalent in the church and seek to show you the effects of looking through the wrong and right lenses with the goal of fitting us with corrective lenses where necessary so that we all might have a biblical worldview as we seek to do church God's way

With that in mind, we are going to begin by looking at how **the lens of purpose defines our practice**

In other words,

What we see as the reason for our existence as a church will provide the driving force for the things we do

That seems to be a common sense statement, right?

We can all agree that it just makes sense that we would strive do the things we truly think God wants us to do

That we would allocate resources and design our facilities, programs, ministries, and so forth to have the best chance of fulfilling our purpose

And we would hope that we would be united in having a clear understanding of our purpose so that we would be unified in our prayers, our decision making, and our labors thereby eliminating rancor and disputes and giving ourselves the best chance of being effective

In fact, we would hope that would be true of every church and of every believer in every church

Our passage this morning is **Matthew 28:18-20** which contains what we refer to as the “Great Commission”

We’ve looked at this passage in the past and I’m sure we believe we know it well and some of you may be tempted to tune out and think about other things for the next half hour or so

In fact, you might think that such a passage is so well known in Christendom that it shouldn’t even need to be talked about

However, the Barna Group published findings from a recent study of theirs that reported that fully 51% of all churchgoers have never even heard of the Great Commission let alone knows what it is

They further report that only 37% of churchgoers could pick the Great Commission passage out of a list of passages with the second choice being 16% picking the “Great Commandments” passage from **Matthew 22:36-40**

Those numbers get a bit better when looking just at self-described Evangelicals as 60% of Evangelicals reported having heard of the Great Commission and remembered what it is

But still, **40% of Evangelicals are unfamiliar** with the passage that, along with **Acts 1:8**, contains the last instructions Jesus gave to his disciples before he ascended to glory and which together serve as the marching orders of the church

The conclusion would have to be that there may be some confusion in many churches about what the purpose of the church is according to God’s Word

I. Purpose: Fellowship or Outreach?

In my studies I came across another survey where church members were asked to:

“Pick from the following statements the one that best describes the main purpose of the church”

And the survey showed the following options:

- A. To teach the Golden Rule
- B. To be the moral backbone of society
- C. To make disciples
- D. To provide a place of fellowship and share God’s love with one another

Which one would you say is the main purpose of the church?

57% of respondents to the survey said the main purpose of the church was “**D**” **To provide a place of fellowship and share God’s love with one another**

35% said the correct answer was “**C**” **To make disciples**

And the remaining **8%** were pretty evenly split between the other two answers

Inward looking church

So over half of church members surveyed believe the main purpose of the church is **fellowship** which means they believe that the church exists primarily for those who are already in the church

It’s easy to see how the church whose members believe the church is a place for the members to come to fellow ship and share God’s love with each other will engage in practices that are **inward looking** and based on self-satisfaction

In time that church will begin to function more like a social club where things are done mainly for the benefit, comfort, and enjoyment of the members

And those who are already in the church will eventually come to expect to have their needs and desires be met

After all, if the church exists to provide a suitable venue and social structure for the members that would be the logical way to do things

Outward looking church

But in churches that believe the main purpose of the church is **making disciples** or **outreach** the focus will be on those who are not yet a part of the church

That is to say it will be an **outward looking** church

Ministry focus will shift from a “what does the church offer me” to a “what can we offer to others” mentality

And from a “let’s be the best church *in* our community” to a “let’s be the best church *for* our community”

As the members seek to bring new people into the church they will naturally begin to look at the church through the eyes of a visitor

They will forgo or subordinate their own preferences and take pains to welcome newcomers, to make them feel at home, and to help them assimilate by easing their entry into the life and ministry of the church

Biblical lens

So what does God’s Word say about the main purpose of the church?

While there are passages that speak to the need to gather together such as **Hebrews 10:25** and the need to support one another such as **Galatians 6:2** it should be clear from **Matthew 28:19** and **Acts 1:8** that God’s *main* purpose for his church is to reach others with the gospel message of salvation

Every day, on average, 151,600 people shuffle off this mortal coil and if we believe Jesus’ teaching about the wide and narrow ways we know most of them die without being reconciled to God through having accepted Jesus Christ

We have an urgent task before us as every minute over 100 people draw their final breath and no one when their time is going to be up and also because we know that God has set a time when the opportunity to decide will end and that time could come at any moment

The Lord's return is imminent and people all around the world – and right in our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and even our families – need to hear the gospel while there is still time

Brick Church

At Brick Church, we claim to view our purpose through that biblical lens and that we strive to be a church that is outward looking and seeking to continually make disciples – that is to say faithful followers – of our Lord Jesus Christ

It's even enshrined in our official Purpose Statement that's a part of our church constitution

That purpose statement begins with a statement of our love for God that we demonstrate by our worship and obedience and then continues:

Brick Church exists...to demonstrate love toward mankind through our acts of service and the proclamation of God's Word so that unbelievers might also come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ...

Clearly we know what Scripture says should be our reason for existence as a church and we've stated officially that we are in alignment with it

But it takes more than knowing and even intending something to make it so – it takes constant vigilance

Let's face it we all have the tendency to want to be comfortable and to have our needs and wants met

And if we're not careful and if we don't examine our motives and our actions we could easily find ourselves subtly, almost imperceptibly, becoming a social club church

That's why we always need to remind ourselves of the job that God has given us to do and to dedicate ourselves to doing it each day and to regularly review our ministries, methods, and motivations to make certain we are

While how we view our purpose has the largest effect on how we minister so does how we view this **place** and what its main function should be

II. Place: Playing Field or Locker Room?

I know I'm not alone in being grateful and thanking God for this facility

It's a wonderful facility with a great deal of history and we are blessed by God allowing us to have this building and grounds

But viewing this facility through the wrong lens can seriously hinder our ministry even if we have the right perspective on our purpose

Let me ask you, do you see the *main* function of this church building to be the **playing field** or the **locker room**?

Right now the Milwaukee Brewers are involved in the major league playoffs and trying to get to the World Series

They are riding a strong winning streak and appear to be peaking at just the right time to make a solid run deep into the playoffs

You don't know how badly I wish I was able to use my St. Louis Cardinals for this illustration instead of the Brewers but they suffered a streak of losing efforts at the same time the Brewers were surging

There are a lot of factors that contribute to a winning effort but one that is so obvious that we often overlook it is that if one wants to be successful one has to take the field and play the game

The locker room is a very important place; in fact it's vital to a team's success

I just heard commentary this week that spoke to the team leaders for the Brewers and how they work behind the scenes in the locker room to build team cohesiveness and comradery that translates into solid teamwork on the field

But the Brewers didn't win a single game by staying in the locker room because that's not where the game is played

And the same is true of the church – this building is not meant to be where the majority of ministry happens

When we looked at Acts 20:1-12 this past summer we saw that this passage showed us the reasons to come to church are: for **encouragement, edification or education**, and **energizing** to prepare us to go out and minister in our daily lives

And those purposes fit more with the analogy of a locker room with our lives being the playing field

Don't get me wrong, ministry happens here also

Certainly we minister to one another here in the activities of encouraging, teaching, and building one another up and those are vitally important as we go out and face a world that is often cold if not openly hostile to the gospel

And we have ministries here that have an outreach function such as Quest and Grand Folks

But the real purpose of this facility is to give us a place to gather and prepare to go forth and minister

We see that in **verse 19** of our passage where Jesus said, "Go therefore..."

Notice he didn't say huddle amongst yourselves, get ready, and make disciples of those who find you – he said "Go"

And that "go" indicates a continuing, ongoing action that means more like "as you are going" which shows us that disciple-making is an activity that primarily takes place – or at least has its genesis – in ministry efforts that occur out there in the world as we go about our normal activities

In **Matthew 4:19** Jesus came to Peter and his brother Andrew as they were busy fishing and as they were casting their nets into the sea, Jesus called to them and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

The implication is that fishing for men is much like fishing for fish in that it requires us to go out and fish

No fisherman would expect to be successful if he merely sat in his boat at the dock and never cast a line or a net into the water and simply waited for the fish to jump into the boat

Not that we won't make every effort to minister to those who do cross our threshold on their own

I would have to say that most if not all who visit Brick Church are made to feel very welcome here

I know that was the experience Kathy and I had when we first visited here over 9 years ago

This was the warmest, friendliest, most welcoming church we visited during our long search for where God wanted us to make our church home – and we visited a lot of good churches during that time

But, for us to merely make our church attractive and minister to those who find us is not living up to the command Jesus gave to his church to "go" and to be his witnesses to people near and far

Jesus' command to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" indicates that activity beyond the confines of the walls of the church is **necessary and normal** –

Because disciple-making is not a passive activity and it primarily happens as we go about our lives intentionally seeking those to whom we can introduce our Lord

So we need to put on the corrective lens of Scripture and see the church for what primarily is – a place for believers to gather to prepare one another to continue in ministry out in the world

This view is also enshrined in our official purpose statement which continues:

[A]nd to instruct and encourage each believer to become His true disciple

A "true disciple" implies that a person is not only a believer but a true follower of Jesus Christ who is seeking to pattern their life after his example by doing what we see him doing in Scripture

And following involves both learning and doing which brings us to our third area where we need to make certain we are looking through a biblical lens and seeing **people** correctly

III. People: Learners or Doers?

I read an article this week that revealed what we likely all know is true but we just haven't thought about it

The article pointed out that people on average now spend significantly more time watching cooking shows or reading about cooking than they spend actually cooking

The article cited a survey of 2,000 people and more than half of them admitted they would rather watch someone cook a meal on TV or look at food photos online than cook a meal themselves

That's really not surprising I suppose

I remember watching a show with my mom when I was a kid called "The Galloping Gourmet" that was hosted by a man named Graham Kerr I believe but I don't remember any of the dishes he showed us how to prepare making it to our table

And the same thing was true when Jeff Smith had his "Frugal Gourmet" show on TV – Kathy and I were frequent viewers of that show but I don't think we ever did more than pick up a handy cooking tip or two from it

Those surveyed also estimated they spent about an hour and a half watching cooking shows on TV and another 3-1/2 hours looking at food photos and recipes online

I suspect that I've seen a whole lot more recipes posted on Facebook or printed out and filed that have been actually produced – at least that would be my deduction having offered to taste-test many of them, especially in regards to recipes for pie, without any samples coming my way...

We've largely become people eager to learn about cooking while and yet we fail to put that learning into practice

We see that also in more traditional academic circles where we've all come across the professional student who accumulates one degree after another yet never does anything productive or meaningful with their learning

Unfortunately, we've also seen that trend in the church as we view ourselves as **learners** but often fail to apply the knowledge we gain as **doers**

Our passage this morning tells us part of the disciple-making process is teaching in **verse 20**

But the Bible never separates learning from doing – teaching in Scripture is always shown as being done to achieve an effect; to make a difference

James 1:22-25 shows us the biblical lens for viewing the teaching and learning activities of the church:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

We err when we convince ourselves that learning more about God and his Word and make increased knowledge the goal rather than the means to more effective ministry

Adopting that attitude makes us like the Dead Sea that takes in all that the Jordan River can carry but has no outlet

This inflow without outflow causes the Dead Sea to be one of the saltiest bodies of water on the planet – 9.6 times saltier than the ocean – making it a place where life cannot flourish

I once had a boss tell me, "Knowledge is power; when you share your knowledge you dilute your power."

What an unbiblical idea that is!

I told him, "I agree that knowledge is power but I also believe when I share what I know I multiply my power."

So, while it's true that learning more and more will make us better and better if we don't ever share what we have learned we will have selfishly surrendered our usefulness in giving more abundant life to others

Let's be honest, making disciples can be a pain

It's actually harder and takes a lot more time than simply doing things ourselves

I see effective disciple-making as having 5 steps

Now, this isn't a rigid list and some steps can be skipped from time-to-time depending on each circumstance but they provide a general framework for effectively passing on knowledge and turning someone into a doer rather than simply a learner of facts

First, the teacher does a task while the student watches, asks questions, and learns

Second, the student begins to help the teacher do the task – the beginning of hands-on learning

Third, the student does the task while the teacher helps – hands-on learning reinforced by doing with support

Fourth, the student does while the teacher watches – the final stage of learning transitioning to independence

Fifth, the disciple does the task and begins to teach another – transition to disciple-maker

And the cycle continues and by following it we ensure that the doing is not neglected because it's this combination of learning and doing that makes a person a true disciple and not merely a student

We recently had the privilege of having Rick and Amy Parker who are missionaries from Brazil here for a visit

While talking with us Amy shared that one of the greatest blessings of their ministry was seeing the circle of ministry come full circle as those who had become believers as a result of their evangelistic efforts had gone on to take part in the educational opportunities their ministry provided and were now leading others to Christ and teaching them how to become mature in the faith

And that should be the goal of all of our learning as we internalize it, become more mature believers, and then pass the lessons and truths on to others who will go on and do the same with others also

Actually, her account serves as a fitting example of the church's mission being faithfully carried out generationally

Conclusion

Our worldview matters and how we see things determines how we behave

And we can flip that statement to say it's also true in that how we behave reveals how we see things

So we need to always take stock and give ourselves an "eye exam" of sorts that evaluates whether what we say we believe is actually reflected in our actions and demonstrated in our attitudes

Just as we do when we regularly return to the eye doctor to have our vision checked and re-corrected

And we need to assess whether the way we view things is in line with Scripture –

In other words, do we have a biblical worldview?

With our eyes the standard we aim for is to have 20/20 vision which means we see things the way we are supposed to see them and the Bible provides that standard in a spiritual and ministerial sense for believers

This is true of us as individuals and it's true of us as a church

We need to assess every ministry to determine how it contributes to our biblical purpose for existing as a church – or perhaps whether it contributes to our purpose at all or is a diversion from our purpose that may feel good but actually takes away from what God wants us to be doing

Earlier I told you that Barna is reporting that 51% of churchgoers aren't familiar with the Great Commission which means that they aren't familiar with the God-given mission of the church and her members

Given that over half of churchgoers don't know their mission is it any wonder that so many churches have abandoned God's design for the church as the Lord convicts the church of Ephesus of having done in **Revelation 2**?

Is it any wonder that many churches have instead of focusing on making disciples and being witnesses for the Lord have turned to becoming advocates and agents of other causes?

The church as a whole is in dire need of the corrective lenses of the Bible as alignment to make certain to see things the way God does

Because that's the only way we will have a proper understanding of why we exist

It's the only way we will avoid seeing the church as a place where we gather for our own sake thereby making the church an institution to be maintained and perpetuated for ourselves alone and instead see the church as a place to be educated, encouraged and energized and not as the place where all ministry happens but as the base from which to go forth and make disciples of those God puts before us

Let's pray