

What is the mission of the church?

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Date: 09 February 2025

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[0 : 00] So, we're starting a short series looking at the mission of the church and the values of our church. And I'm going to do some of them, David's going to do some of them as well.

And we're thinking tonight about what the church is for, right? So, what does the church exist for? And then in coming weeks we're sort of thinking about what should the church be like, okay? So, what is the church for? And then what should it be like? So, that's the kind of vision and these are the kind of values, yeah?

So, what are we doing and how are we doing it? In what kind of manner are we doing it? So, to get your mind going, I want you, perhaps with the person next to you, or you can do it on your own if you would like to, I want you to fill in the blank.

The church exists to... Fill in the blank. You can write whatever you like, except make me rich.

[1 : 01] You're not allowed to write that. Okay, anything you like. Okay, does anyone want to fire back their answers? The church exists to...

All I heard was... Mike's got his hand up. Yeah, that's the... What is it, too, with both the people, Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

So it's a demonstration of what God can do. Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

Displaying his presence. Yeah. Yeah. Anybody else? Yes.

Yeah. To glorify God. Yeah. Yeah. How in particular does the church glorify God? What is it about the church that glorifies God?

[2 : 32] Spreads the word of God? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. By building a community? Yeah. Yeah. And it's like ■ yeah yes yeah yes yes so glorifying is if you like going public on the greatness of isn't it so if I'm glorifying God

I am declaring his greatness I am yeah going public on what God is like yeah yeah anybody else yeah yeah yeah yeah discipling baptizing reaching unbelievers with the gospel yeah um I don't I don't think I've heard a wrong answer yet right so I'm I think that's all great I think I to try and bring some clarity to our thinking I want to talk about a primary goal a primary means and two twin aims okay and your handout really is the Bible verses so that you don't have to spend ages flicking through the Bible and there are some questions that we're going to discuss together as well so let me try and head through this a primary goal I think that it might sound a bit obvious and Mike said it and Ray also picked it up that the church exists for the glory of God in the way that everything exists for the glory of God everything points to the glory of God but the church exists to worship God right to ascribe worth to God to declare his greatness and his glory and we need to start there I think because this if you like is the goal to which all other things become subordinate glorifying God making God look great ascribing worth to him is the reason for the existence of the church that the Westminster Confession says what is the chief end of man man exists to glorify God and enjoy him forever and that's essentially trying to summarize passages like Romans 11 which is there in front of you Romans 11 is that great hymn that Paul comes to at the end of his kind of overview of the gospel and then he he summarizes it by saying this oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor who has ever given to God that God should repay him for from him and through him and for him are all things to him be the glory forever everything comes from him is existing through him and for him and the church is part of that isn't it there to bring glory to God but if that's true of all things in general it is true even more specifically for the church not just the church in general but for a local church

Ephesians 3 verse 7 down to verse 11 says this Paul writes I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power although I am less than the least

of all the Lord's people this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery which for ages past was kept hidden in God who created all things this is his mission to declare the gospel around the nations to reveal what had been kept hidden which has now been made plain in the Lord Jesus Christ his intent verse 10 was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms!

According to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord this is the purpose of God in the church yeah that his intent was that through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms there is a kind of declaration of the glory and majesty and worthiness of God in the existence of the church specifically it seems the existence of the church made up of people from all nations which declares God's greatness his manifold wisdom in other words if you were to go for a walk in the countryside and to see a kind of view of a great mountain you would like think wow I wonder who made that God made that he must be amazing and glorious look what a great painter he is what a great craftsman he is in making that you are also then in a more profound way to look at a community of believers and say what kind of God has pulled them together and rescued them that God is a worthy

[8:10] God a God of glory a God we should praise I think there's another way to prove this too it's because the eternal purpose of the church long after we have finished discipling and evangelizing people the eternal purpose of the church is that we would go on worshipping and declaring God's glory and greatness Revelation 5 that picture of John's vision of heaven he says worthy is the lamb who was slain this is the song of heaven worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the lamb be praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever and the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped the song will sorry the church will be eternally singing of the glory and greatness and majesty of God we will be singing of his great worth come and sit over here Anthony so I want you to with the person next to you now have a think what difference does it make starting with the glory of God and not the aims of evangelism and discipleship how would you expect church to feel different if it was aiming at worship first and not just at evangelism and discipleship okay have a think about that with the person next to you for a moment okay what difference do we think it would make starting with worship and glory and not evangelism and discipleship what difference do you think that might make what were you all talking about then okay mm-hmm yeah yeah so yep yeah so

I am not just talking about singing no so we're talking about yeah glorifying God in general worship yeah so I we're going to talk about the gatherings of the church in a moment but yes yeah it's it Yeah, yeah.

yeah yeah yeah I think I think that's really helpful so I think if we starting with worship in God's glory so saying that the church exists to worship God to bring God glory to ascribe worth honor to him means that it's not primarily starting with us it means that church is about the Lord and not about us it's about what he's doing and not about what we're doing the danger is that if church is about firstly about evangelism there are things that you might be tempted to do to cut corners to make church feel slightly more effective and and that would obviously be a wrong thing to do yeah go on yeah okay yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah so faithfulness just becomes much higher up the agenda doesn't it yeah yeah okay so that's our primary goal our primary means then um there are obviously many ways to glorify

God many things that we could do and should do and will do that will make God look great but there is one thing which a church does which is the primary means of bringing God glory a primary tool I think also for these twin aims of evangelism and discipleship and that is the church gathers right the church gathers together for worship now I'm sure you don't need me to prove this to you but I'm going to do it anyway so let's try and work through this together and there should be some scriptures on your handout as well the point is that you could be an adequate church without lots of things right so you could be a healthy church that doesn't have a youth work or a toddler group or doesn't have a load of musicians who are able to play on a on a sunday or doesn't serve really nice coffee after the service or whatever you could be an adequate church with any of those things those things might be good things to do but they're not essential things if you don't gather you're not a

church right so church by definition is a gathering right it's a gathering together of God's people if we don't do that then we're not a church we can be even more specific can't we if we don't gather to worship to celebrate the Lord's

Supper and to practice baptism we're not a church because those things have been given to the church by the Lord Jesus for the means of his glory in a way it's just sort of assumed this in the New Testament word ecclesia which is translated church just literally means gathering I think it's used even of the rioters in Ephesus in the book of Acts who are a gathering of rioters so church essentially means meeting together gathering together for the purpose of worship it's what's happening all the way through the book of Acts and it probably the simplest place to show it is there in Hebrews 10 which is there on your handout in verse 19 therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with full assurance that faith brings having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching you get the sense don't you that the the church has experienced salvation for the purpose of gathering for worship is why it's full of old testament language and verse 25 is pretty clear that this meeting together is good for us as well as glorifying for

[16:04] God so the church has a primary means of bringing God's glory which is gathering together for corporate worship worship which involves singing praise it involves reading God's word it involves the preaching of God's word it involves praying it involves practicing baptism and lord supper together why do you think then and this is the next question just to discuss with the person next you why do you think the new testament places such a high value on the church meeting together for the purpose of corporate worship why do you think that's so important in the new testament because it's probably fair to say that most christians don't think that gathering together is quite as important as hebrews 10 25 might suggest that it is certainly the people who are the first readers of hebrews are not thinking that it's as important as it really is which is why verse 25 is written to them don't give it up as some as in the habit of doing so why do you think it does have a talk with the person next to you and we'll come back together okay what are our thoughts why do you think the new testament places such a high value on the church meeting together for corporate worship okay yes yeah yeah thank you but encouraging one other and all the more as you see the day approaching yeah yeah it anticipates it's going to be hard to keep going and you will need encouragement of meeting with other believers yes that's really helpful did you hear that so the the church meeting together with a a diverse group of people enables us to be way more balanced as christians because we're hearing from one another yes yes yeah that's really helpful thanks mike yeah anything else yes yes yes so it enables you to benefit from the gifts of others doesn't it yeah that you don't have yourself yeah that's really helpful i think i'd want to add that there's there's a movement in the bible isn't there that we are in one sense genesis one and two the garden of eden is like a kind of mini temple in the in the presence of god and they are they are living and enjoying the presence of god and they are excluded from it so they've they've entered into god's rest on the seventh day and are with him in his place yeah worshipping him living their lives in front of him for his glory enjoying the benefits of his provision for them and then they are excluded from it and then if you like in in the old testament temple worship they get a they get a sort of window back into what it might be like to live in the presence of god in temple worship and now in the new testament in the gathering of the local church here in hebrews using all this old testament language for for being sprinkled with the with the blood of the lord jesus and being brought near to him and gathering in his presence there's a sense in which that the the high value on the church meeting together is because this is where it's going right this now is a taste of where we will be you know this idea that we're going to be gathered together in the presence of god hearing from his word delighting in what he has done reveling at the lord jesus christ meeting with one another that that's that's our destiny and so on each kind of lord's day we gather at the beginning of the week to enjoy the rest of being with the lord and with his people worshipping and ascribing worth to him as a as a foretaste a glimpse of where we will be for all eternity and so that's why you know that's why you can't you know you become a christian and you by definition become a member of a local church it you know

it brings you into the people of god doesn't it because you're part of this gathering that god is is gathering people from the nations uh for that great and glorious day okay so if it's if the goal of the local church is to bring god glory if its primary means is this kind of corporate gathering then there are two twin aims which um i know many of us started with the the church uh is meant to disciple and uh evangelize so turn to matthew 28 it's there on your sheet matthew 28 verse 18 and this is what we're to be doing to bring god glory then jesus came and said to them all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit and teaching them to obey everything i have commanded you and surely i am with you always to the very end of the age so the church is to go about making disciples isn't it specifically it seems going and making them and then baptizing them into the church and teaching them obedience we put those two labels on it don't we evangelism and discipleship now notice that's not a entirely separate activity to the gathering of the church it's not that the church is meant to gather to worship god and also to evangelize and disciple it seems to me that the gathering of the local church is the means that the lord gives us to evangelize and to build us up in discipleship new testament is clear isn't it that the church should expect unbelievers to be present with them when they gather and they should explain what they're doing accordingly new testament church is told more than that it's the display of the love and unity of the church which is one of the most powerful evidences for the work of god amongst them it's our most powerful apologetic if you like is god real does he really save people yeah come and see come and see what the local church is like the new testament is also very clear that you can't disciple believers without the gathering of the local church but still these activities of evangelism and discipleship are so central to our mission that we're doing them in lots of other ways too so look at these verses with me at the central command in the section is to make disciples it's not to go the go is passive but the the emphasis is on making and not going but of course the going is important you have to leave your house and leave the gatherings of the church to meet people and reach out to them with the gospel making disciples includes fishing for men as jesus talked about interestingly in the new testament this going seems to consist of going and starting other churches in other localities that don't have one so that they may own the mission to that local area and carry on fishing for disciples at the mass of people in each place then that the making of disciples involves the teaching obedience notice it's obedience in everything i have commanded so the church is to teach believers how to obey jesus how to live for him in each and every area of their life and notice two key things here firstly notice that the content of the teaching is the commands of jesus you know that this is similar to what we're thinking about this morning that jesus word accomplishes his purpose this means it's not the job of the church to run seminars or sermons on every single ethical question every church member might face right you know that that's impossible it's it's an impossible task for any church leader to try and address every single question that every individual is going to face instead we know that teaching the word of jesus the commands of jesus is sufficient for all of us as following him that's 2 timothy 3 16 and 17 isn't it which is on your at the back of your handout all scripture is god breathed and is useful for teaching and we need teaching rebuking and we need rebuking correcting training in righteousness so that the servant of god may be thoroughly equipped for every good work just read the verse backwards with me there it there is no good work that you need to be thoroughly equipped for but the scriptures will not equip you for so if your church is teaching you the scriptures they are discipling you for every and any situation that you may face even if they don't address it directly the second thing to notice is that teaching the commands of jesus is done in the strength of the spirit so he is with us always to the end of the age jesus's ongoing presence with his church by the spirit makes the teaching of the word jesus effective in the lives of the people who come so let me just try and put this together just as we finish right the church exists to worship god to bring god glory and it does that as it gathers and as it gathers it gathers to reach unbelievers with the gospel and teach and disciple believers so with that in mind i've got you can pick one of these right talk about with the person next to you a church in the neighborhood has stopped meeting together centrally because it thinks small groups are more effective for evangelism and discipleship is that a good idea why why not a church decides that it's more friendly to outsiders if they're going to stop praying together in their services instead they have moments of silence for the believers in the room to pray in their hearts is that a good idea why or why not knowing that people are reluctant to change a local church has not really asked the question should we still do it like this about their corporate gatherings what are the dangers for them maybe there are none maybe there are some you can pick one and go for it and we'll just have a

brief look at those and then we'll sing to close okay i'm sorry to interrupt your conversations we're going to try and make sure that we finish by half past say does anyone want to who did the first one did anyone do the first one mike and sammy you did the first one what do you think yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah

yeah so really either i think what you're saying i don't want to oversimplify it mike but i think basically what you're saying is either these small groups should become churches themselves and do all the things that local churches should do or they should keep gathering as a church as one church yeah i did anyone else do the first one so anyone else want to chip in on that yes yes so the group should be in addition to the group should be in addition to yeah right that shouldn't happen yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yes that's a really good point the small group it might be a really difficult way for people to find the church yeah yeah i think that the it's unlikely in a small group that you're going to be able to do all the functions of a church net and say actually that means that you're essentially saying that something less than a gathering of god's people is what we're going to do and i think that's unhelpful as no yeah yeah okay go on so what is the practical minimum uh to make for a natural church yeah what is the practical minimum to make for a natural church okay yeah that's right 10 men for a synagogue yeah so i don't think it's that i think um see i think it needs to be more than one person right so i i i think there's that i i think there needs to be something about leadership in the church so i think there's a um we're given the role of elders and deacons it seems in the new testament that unless a church has elders it's disordered and not really functioning properly you need to practice lord's supper you need to practice baptism there needs to be regular gatherings under the word of god um um yeah um yeah so i i think there might be there might be instances where lots of very small churches meeting together might be the most sensible way to do it particularly in situations of persecution um rather than one central gathering yeah yes yes yes yes yeah yeah yeah yeah you think of the house church movement in china and how that's been used by the lord yeah okay okay what about number two should we stop praying together to make ourselves more friendly to the outsiders joe what did you say because i was in your group what did you say what did you say do you think church should stop praying together to be more friendly yes you disagree with it i think great i think you're right joe yes church shouldn't stop praying yeah it's um it is possible for churches to sacrifice too much to try and be friendly to outsiders it seems in the new testament that actually as long as we're explaining what we're doing in fact the sense that it's kind of mysterious to outsiders is part of part of what it should be what about the third one did anyone get that far or anyone start there yeah it sounds pretty desperate yes yeah yeah yeah it seems like churches are specifically located in a time and a place doesn't it and so we've got to think about the time and the place that we're located in um obviously there are boundaries about what we are and aren't to do but in inside of those boundaries we are to ask the question of where am i and what time is it in order to decide what we do great thank you let me pray for us and our church and then we'll stand and sing oh church arise as we close father in heaven we thank you so much for your great and glorious plan of salvation that gathers people like us together in local churches where you display your glory in our diversity how we thank you that we see that here in our church and we praise you for it and ask lord that you would help us to bring you great glory to worship you truly and faithfully and that in doing that we would reach many more with the good news of the lord jesus and disciple and train one another to live to your praise and glory in jesus name amen