

**"WHY ARE WE HERE?"**

Matthew 16:13-20

If you were with us last Sunday I began my sermon by asking the congregation the question: "Do you want your life to count for something, after it is all said and done?" Or another way I phrased it was, "Do you want to make a difference in at least one person's life by the time you cash in your chips?" Well today, I ask another probing question that I want us all to consider and that question is, "Why Are We Here?" Not that I want to get all philosophical on you, but I would like us all to wrestle with the question as individuals and as a congregation, "What is our mission, purpose, reason for being?"

The famous Scottish-born historian and leading figure during the Victorian era, Thomas Carlyle, once said, "A man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder- a waif, a nothing, a no man. Have a purpose in life, and, having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as

God has given you.” It has been said that Christians without goals, without a purpose are a little like Alice in the fairy tale Alice in Wonderland. In a conversation between her and the Cheshire Cat, Alice asked, “Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?” “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the cat. “I don’t much care where,” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the cat.

I was invited to preach this sermon today. That’s right; I was invited by a ministry team in our Eastminster Presbytery, the Congregational Transformation Action Learning Team, to focus on this key question, **“Why Are We Here?”** on Sunday, November 2, 2008—All Saints’ Day. First, focusing on the word WHY- What is our mission, purpose, reason for being? Second, focusing on the word ARE- Church, Community of faith, Congregation. And finally focusing on the word Here- The community around us, Mission field, Context for ministry. So I’ve been invited and I accepted the invitation.

To answer the question, "Why are we [individually] here?" we can find an answer in "The Westminster Shorter Catechism" that was accepted in 1648 by the British Parliament. But to answer this question I want to phrase it in the question asked in the Shorter Catechism and the question is this:

**"What is the chief end of man?** And with any catechism there is a

definitive answer and the answer is: **"Man's chief end is to glorify God,**

**and to enjoy him forever."** To expand more on this answer we need to

look at the word "Enjoy." "Enjoy" refers to the meaning given it originally by

that great Christian thinker Augustine. 1200 years before Westminster

Augustine asked, "How does one regard God?" He went on to ask, "Are we

to seek him for what he can do for us, or as someone to be loved for his own

sake?" And Augustine answered his own question, "We are not to use God

for our own purposes; we are to enjoy God for his own sake." And that is

how the Westminster Assembly picked up on the word "Enjoy". What this

means is God is to be loved unconditionally, for who He is. For when we

have proper love for God it puts God at the center of everything: at the center of one's life, at the center of the nation's existence, at the center of the world's existence, at the center of all of God's creation.

But there is another purpose I would like us to discuss today: The purpose of the church. I have recently read that large numbers of active members in our churches today operate from culturally influenced, subconscious, non-biblical worldviews where **65% are not clear about the purpose of the church; 60% think the pastor is a hired hand to do ministry for the rest; 64% do not approach financial giving from a biblical perspective; and 75% are more concerned about personal comfort than mission activity.**

So, in order to answer the question, "Why Are We Here?" we can look to the question "what is the purpose of the Church and how do we, you and I, play a part in that purpose?"

When Jesus Christ walked this earth, people, everywhere, were trying to figure Him out; trying to figure out His purpose. As He began and throughout His three short years of ministry on this earth there were differing opinions as to whom he was and why He was here. He was a one-of-a-kind, the likes the world had never seen. And so in the confusion of all of this we find, in our passage today, Jesus asking His disciples while they were in the district of Caesarea Philippi this question found in Matthew 16:13, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Now let me set the scene of where this question was asked, because I've been to the place that is said to be the location where this question was asked. Caesarea Philippi is somewhere about 25 miles north of Galilee. It is not the Caesarea on the Mediterranean Coast. Found at the base of Mount Hermon and at the main source of the Jordan River, would have been found this border town. And here the people of Israel would have met up with the people of the Gentile world. In the angle of a small plain, with hills on all

sides except the west and the River Jordan running swiftly down the hill was Caesarea Philippi. But this was also the site of the worship of the idol Pan, the so-called universal god which was of the heathen cults at that time. And it was at this unique site, where Judaism touched up against both the worship of nature and the worship of man that **Jesus asks a General Question** to His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" And their answer is filled with what they had heard other people say about Him. Their answer, verse 14, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." All of the answers are the names of dead men. So what people were saying is men who have come back from the grave. So now, after spending intimate time with these 12 men for about two years where Jesus has revealed nothing about His identity, only revealing to them his character, miracles and teachings, and only asking them to "Follow Me," now He makes it personal and asks them in verse 15, "But who do you say that I am?"

Let me stop right here- it was easy to hide behind what other people were saying but now man-on-man, one on one and He is asking them individually what they think. And, always having something to say, always shooting his mouth off Peter gives an answer not only for himself but the rest of the disciples, verse 16, "You are the Messiah [or the Christ], the Son of the living God." And it is as if Jesus looks at Peter after his response and say, "Pete, you got it. Right on, Pete." Our passage tells us in verse 17 that God, in His graciousness revealed it to Peter.

But read on again with me verse 18 where Jesus says to Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Jesus was telling the disciples a new truth for He used Peter's great confession as a springboard to bring forth the concept of the Church, and the purpose of the Church. Do you know that this is the first time the word "Church" is found in scripture, so we need to

sit up and take notice of what Jesus is saying here about the Church.

Listen to what Jesus has to say the Church should be:

First, a **Pro-Active Church**. Jesus said in verse 18, "I will build my Church..." Those early followers of Jesus were about taking the Good News of Christ into a hostile world where their very lives were at stake. And yet they were bold for Christ, they were not afraid to face rejection or even persecution for being pro-active with their faith. The world was seen as a mission field and they were missionaries. We read in the Book of Acts that, as a result of the early believers' commitment and dedication to spreading the Good News of Christ, Acts 16:5 says that, "the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily." People were willing themselves, to be discipled and they were willing to disciple others because they truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world and they were not afraid or ashamed to tell others. Can the same be said about us? I once heard radio pastor, teacher, preacher

Steve Brown gives us a picture of sharing Christ with someone else, and he said it is, "one beggar telling another beggar where to get a piece of bread."

It's being willing to step out of our comfort zone and at least using some God language to open the door in order to tell our faith story to someone else.

But what holds so many of us back? Could it be a lack of commitment? Really believing what we say? Our own interests, ambitions, desires and comforts? Or do we need to step up to the plate like Peter did, be bold and take a risk and say, "Yes, Jesus is my Savior and Lord and I want others to know Him too, just like those early followers of Jesus who stepped up and were counted for?" It was the great C. S. Lewis who once said, "The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorify Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life." Is it about making disciples and knowing that I made a difference in someone else's spiritual life or is it about my comfort level and not wanting to embarrass or offend someone by

at least beginning a spiritual conversation with them? After all if back in 2004 92% of Americans said they believed in God, according to a Fox News Poll, then why are we so reluctant to talk about God when so many people profess to believe? The church needs to once again, be pro-active and be about building Christ's Church.

And second, a **Determined Church**. Jesus said in verse 18, "the gates of Hades [or hell] will not prevail against" His Church. Why does Jesus Christ want the church to be Determined? Because there will be hostility; there will be opposition. From where? From Hades or Hell- from the power of Satan and his legions. Friends, the ruler of this world, Satan, hates the church, he is the enemy of the church. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Friends, Satan is alive and well and working against God in this world so the church must be a

Determined. And so we need courage, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus; we need to follow the ways of this book, the Bible to keep us moving forward and victorious for Him.

Friends, we have work to do- we must refocus or get focused on why “Why We Are Here?” as individuals and as the Church. When **over 50% of the people in the church say that the primary purpose of the Church is for Fellowship**, and don’t get me wrong, fellowship is crucial, but we have work to do because those who believe this are out of step with Christ.

For the **primary purpose of the church is found in one verse of the Bible: Matthew 28:19, and see if you can listen for the key word where Jesus said**, “go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” What is the key word? Disciples. Making Disciples.

Friends, we need to get back to what we are called to do for if, on any given Sunday, only 18% of the American people are attending a church of their choice, Friends, we have work to do. Why are We Here? We know. Amen.

## “WHY ARE WE HERE?”

Matthew 16:13-25

Introduction: Why are we here? What is our mission, purpose, reason for being?

Christians without goals, without a purpose are a little like Alice in the fairy tale Alice in Wonderland

To answer the question, Why are we [individually] here we can find an answer in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* of 1648 in this question: **What is the chief end of man?** Answer: **Man’s chief end is to \_\_\_\_\_ God, and to \_\_\_\_\_ him forever.**

The purpose of the Church

Date on a large number of active members in our churches:

\_\_\_% **are not clear about the purpose of the church**

\_\_\_% **think the pastor is hired to do the ministry for the rest**

\_\_\_% **do not approach financial giving from a biblical perspective**

\_\_\_% **are more concerned about personal comfort than mission activity**

Matthew 16:13- “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

Setting the scene- Caesarea Philippi

Jesus asks a \_\_\_\_\_ question to His disciples, “Who do people...”

Jesus asks a personal question in vs. 15, “But who do YOU say that I am?”

Peter’s answer...

Vs. 18, what Jesus says to Peter- what the Church should be...

1st, a \_\_\_\_\_ **Church** “I will build my church” vs. 18

Acts 16:5- “The churches were strengthened in the faith and ***increased*** in numbers daily”

What holds so many of us back?

And 2nd, a \_\_\_\_\_ **Church** “The gates of Hades will not prevail...” vs. 18  
Ephesians 6:12

Conclusion: The primary purpose of the church is found in Matthew 28:19, **“Go therefore and make \_\_\_\_\_ of all nations,...”**