

**Series:** Five: Timeless Values for Today's Church

**Title:** Community Engagement

**Text:** Acts 1:8

**Date:** January 29, 2023

At Tabernacle Baptist Church, "Community Engagement" is our fifth core value. We have stated this value by saying, "We desire to show Christ to those around us by serving our community." At Tabernacle, we believe we must see beyond church walls to the people around us. Yes, we should engage in international missions and church planting within our nation. In addition, we believe we can minister to many people within our county, as well as the areas surrounding our city. Such a scope of ministry seems explicitly required by the Lord's command in Acts 1:8. In that passage, Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Other Bible passages that inform this core value include Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; John 17:18; Acts 17:6; and 1 Peter 4:8.

Tabernacle's passion for community engagement is in concert with its standing as a church that is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Historically, SBC churches have been known for a zealous commitment to world evangelism and missions. In fact, the Baptist Faith & Message (2000), the statement of faith for the SBC, provides a doctrinal statement concerning the priority of gospel proclamation amongst local congregations. Such a statement is remarkable, considering the fact that many of the historical confessions of the protestant faith make little to no mention of such things. The Baptist Faith & Message reads:

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As we hold to the Baptist Faith & Message (2000) as our church's doctrinal statement, Tabernacle affirms the above statement. However, Scripture is our ultimate guide when it comes to things like missions and world evangelization. When we peruse the pages of Scripture, we see three ideas that emphasize the importance of local churches reaching out to their community.

## **THE WORKS OF GOD**

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<sup>1</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention. *The Baptist Faith & Message*. (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2000), 16.

Theologians often discuss the subject of “the works of God.” In doing so, they generally highlight three different works that can be attributed to the Lord alone. The first is that of creation (Genesis 1:1-31). The second involves what could be called God’s providence, emphasizing the Lord’s hand in establishing human institutions (the family, government, and the church) for the preservation of society (Genesis 1:28-31; Romans 13:1; Matthew 16:18). The third work of God is the work of redemption (Romans 8:29-30).

Jesus emphasized the works of the Lord by saying, “My Father is still working, and I am working also” (John 5:17). The Psalmist sang, “Indeed, the Protector of Israel does not slumber or sleep” (Psalm 121:4). Though the Lord rested after the six days of creation in order to set a precedent for His created order, He Himself never ceases from His work. In His omnipotence (all-powerful) He continually sustains His created order by His power and might.

For the purposes of our discussion here, it is necessary to highlight the Lord’s work of redemption. Some refer to this work as God’s work of grace or God’s work of salvation. Christian doctrine concerning this work highlights the Lord’s role in establishing a plan of salvation before time began. In the book of Revelation, the Bible speaks of “the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Those words emphasize the eternal nature of God’s work of salvation. Before the dawn of human history, the Lord had a plan to redeem a people for Himself.

## **THE MISSION OF JESUS**

While Jesus was on Earth, He understood that He had a unique role in God’s work of salvation. He boldly professed, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38). Just a few hours before His crucifixion, He prayed in agony, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus submitted Himself to the will of the Father for His life, but what was that will? In Luke 19:10, Jesus encapsulated the will of the Father for His life by saying, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.” The title “Son of Man” emphasized Jesus’ human nature. Through what is known as “the incarnation,” Jesus embraced human flesh on our behalf. He willingly left the portals of glory to live among humanity and die for the sins of God’s people (Philippians 2:5-11).

The early church was gripped by the realities of Christ’s work. Living in a world of religious pluralism and syncretism, they were ostracized for declaring that Jesus was “...the way, the truth, and the life...” (John 14:6). They were beaten, imprisoned, and told to remain silent. In response to their persecutors, they doubled down, proclaiming the name of Jesus: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

## **THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS**

All of what has been shared above leads us to Tabernacle’s core value of community engagement. We desire to be a church that is actively engaged in our community for the purpose of representing Christ and sharing His good news. Winnie the Pooh once said, “You can’t stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You

have to go to them sometimes.”<sup>2</sup> While Pooh was a cute, soft-spoken animated bear, he did share good advice at times. As God’s people at Tabernacle, we believe the Lord doesn’t want us to stay in our little “corner of the forest.” He wants us to actively engage others for the sake of gospel advancement. In studying the New Testament, we find that such engagement involves three important commitments.

### **An “As You Go” Mentality**

In His well known “Great Commission,” Jesus provided the mission for His church. He said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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” (Matthew 28:18-19). A.T. Robertson, the well-known Southern Baptist Greek scholar, called the Great Commission “The Magna Carta” of all missionary work.

Many have noted that the word translated “Go” in Matthew 28:19 appeared as a participle in the original language of the New Testament. Thus, it depicted disciples making disciples as they went about their daily activities. Perhaps a more helpful translation of Jesus’ words would be, “As you go, make disciples....” One has said that “Jesus’ main focus...” was that it is “...the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be.”<sup>3</sup>

At Tabernacle Baptist, we are committed to taking the gospel to the nations through international missions. In addition, we aim to have an “As You Go” mentality. We want each member to duplicate themselves wherever they may be. We have weekly organized ministries that labor to get the gospel to our community. Recently our church has started ministries like Champion of Lights, English Practice classes, Grief Share, Hello Neighbor, and Celebrate Recovery. All of these are designed to get the gospel to people in our community.

In addition to these things, many of our members have organically started ministries on their own. Some have found ways to minister on basketball courts. Others are leveraging their workplace in creative ways. I know of members who volunteer in non-profits in town, using their involvement as a platform to share Christ. Some have started ministries to minister to the needy in our community. Others have personally launched ministries to minister to children with special needs. One of our men has invested his own resources in a ministry to boys. It’s called “Men Build Men.”

Tabernacle is driven by a conviction that we must make Christ known within our community and world. One has rightly said, “The Great commission is not a mere wish or suggestion; it is a command that is just as valid and relevant for Jesus’ followers today as it was when it was first given.”<sup>4</sup> Our church shares the conviction of those who wrote those words. We may all share Christ in different ways, but we are all called to share!

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<sup>2</sup> Winnie the Pooh, *Pooh's Little Instruction Book*.

<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, Craig. *The New American Commentary: Matthew, Volume 22*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 431.

<sup>4</sup> Kostenberger, J. Andreas and Taylor, Justin. *The Final Days of Jesus*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 200-201.

## **Holy Lives**

In His plan for His church, the Lord likes to use the transformed lives of His people as a witness to Him. Though salvation is not earned by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9), it is evidenced by good works (Matthew 7:16; Ephesians 2:10; Revelation 20:12). Jesus clearly taught that genuine salvation would produce a visible result in the lives of His followers (Matthew 5:16). It is for this reason that the apostles often regarded the transformed lives of God's people as the most basic form of Christian witness. Peter said, "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits" (1 Peter 2:12).

As we seek to impact our community for Christ, we should remember these things. Living the Christian life before others is a primary way of influencing them for the gospel. One has said, "The world takes notice of believers who are different."<sup>5</sup> May we diligently pursue growth in Christ (2 Peter 3:18) so that others might see His character through us.

## **Gospel Proclamation**

Living holy lives is important, but holy lives alone will never lead anyone to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. One has commented: "...it is one thing to display the gospel through our lives. It is quite another to open our mouths and share."<sup>6</sup> The apostle Paul was aware of the pivotal importance of gospel proclamation. It is for this reason that he said, "...woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Faithful and effective Christian witnessing requires that one share the concepts of the gospel. A church like Tabernacle can never truly impact its community for Christ if it doesn't utter gospel truth. This is true because salvation is imparted by the precepts of the gospel. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). He also said, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Charles Spurgeon once said, "I do not believe that a good word for Christ is ever spoken in vain."<sup>7</sup> To be a faithful witness, one only needs to tell others about Jesus. News concerning Jesus' life, death, and resurrection contains supernatural power for the converting of souls. May we be faithful to share, and may the Lord use us to impact this world for Christ!

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<sup>5</sup> Campbell, Roger. *Staying Positive in a Negative World: Attitudes That Enhance the Joy of Living*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 122.

<sup>6</sup> Gallaty, Robby. *Growing Up How To Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples*. (Nashville, Tn: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 126.

<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 1880; 26*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 503.