

1. The story I am going to read is found in all 4 of the gospels. I want to read out of the book of Mark.
 2. Mark 11:15-18 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.
1. In this passage we see Jesus become very upset and even angry with those at the temple who were selling cattle and sheep and doves and exchanging money.
 2. Now, to be clear, Jesus was not upset necessarily because this type of activity was going on. In fact God had commanded the children of Israel to travel every year to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.
 3. God had made provision for their sacrifices in case the journey was a long one. That provision gave them the freedom to bring silver to Jerusalem and exchange that silver for the local currency and purchase what they needed to worship the Lord in the temple.
 4. So again, Jesus was not upset that they were transacting business. This business was necessary for proper worship to take place.
 5. Jesus became upset partly because these Jews who had set up shop in the temple courts were taking advantage of their brothers which was strictly forbidden in the book of Leviticus.
 6. They were charging their brothers excessive prices to exchange their money and purchase animals.
 7. But beyond the fact that they were making an excessive profit, we find the real reason why Jesus became so angry, angry enough to drive the animals from the temple area, angry enough to overturn the tables of the money changers and scatter coins all over the place, angry enough to yell at those who were engaged in all this immoral activity, we find the real reason for Jesus anger in Mark 11:17 "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

8. First of all Jesus made something extremely clear. He informed those there that day that this was his house. And because it was his house he had a vested interest in what went on in it.
9. And what caused Jesus so much distress was that they had taken his house and were doing in it something he had not commanded. Jesus said, my house will be called a house of prayer but you are making it a den of robbers.
10. In other words, what Jesus was saying was, I have a plan for my house, I have a plan for my church, but you have deviated from that plan and you are focusing on something that I never intended.
11. I am going to begin sharing with you over the next few weeks about the Church. And specifically we are going to be talking about what Jesus expects to happen and take place in his church.
12. Now, before I go further, I want to be clear I am not speaking to some particular problem. These messages about the purpose of the church are not meant to correct something, they are meant as a reminder.
13. And as I share with you this reminder, I am approaching it from the perspective that I believe you care about the church you attend.
14. How many here this morning genuinely care about this church. I believe you. And may I tell you, I genuinely care about this church.
15. But I must tell you there is someone who cares about this church more than all of us put together and that is Jesus.
16. **Why does Jesus care so much about this church? Because it is his church.** And because it is his church Jesus has the final say about what goes on in it. It is His influence that should be the deciding factor in what we do or don't do.
17. It is his desire that should be the driving force behind the decisions we make and how we function and how we worship and how we preach.
18. Prior to covid, there was a practice that had been occurring for several decades that is not necessarily a bad practice. I am not being critical of other ministries or leaders because I have in fact engaged in this practice.

19. But there has been a practice over many years that church leaders from all over the country and now the world will converge on a place to listen to a high profile leader who has experienced relative success in his place of calling and we will listen intently to glean as many ideas and strategies as we possibly can with the hopes that it will make a difference in the place where we serve.
20. Now there is nothing wrong with learning from others and getting ideas from others. I do that and I will continue to do that. I believe it is healthy. I believe God is using people in powerful ways and I can learn from how they are being used.
21. But at the end of the day my job isn't to try and clone myself and clone this church into being just like some other leader or some other ministry.
22. At the end of the day we are not looking to someone else to pattern ourselves after. Our answers don't come from them.
23. **At the end of the day our Goal is to be like Jesus.** At the end of the day our goal is to be doing the things that will be pleasing to God in this location so that Jesus doesn't have to show up and start throwing things around and turning over tables and sending everything flying.
24. How many would like to avoid that if at all possible? I certainly would.
25. Our Goal as a church and as individual believers is to be as much like Jesus as possible.
26. They say you look like what you care most about. Let's look at some examples.
 - a. **First slide**
 - b. **Second slide**
 - c. **Third slide**
 - d. **Fourth slide**
 - e. **Fifth slide**
27. Now that doesn't only happen with animals, it happens with people.
28. When I first met my future wife, and then my future mother-in-law, I commented at how much they looked alike.
29. I was absolutely shocked on our third date when this beautiful lady informed me that she was adopted. That Ellen was not her biological mother.

30. I thought for the longest time Patti was joking. But her friend cleared it up for me. That didn't change the fact that they still looked very much alike.
31. According to Romans 8:23 we have been adopted as sons and daughters and God's desire is that we look like Christ.
32. But there is a tremendous problem that is occurring in the church of America and that is that the church doesn't look very much like its founder.
33. I shared this verse a couple of weeks ago when talking about Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus.
34. Jesus makes it very clear what his mission was in coming to earth to establish his church **Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."**
35. Obviously from that verse it's easy to see that what's important to Jesus is the salvation of the lost.
36. How many would agree with that?
37. But what's interesting is that from the early 2000's right up to the beginning of Covid-19, most of the major research that was published about the church of the United States tells us that the church wasn't carrying out Christ's mission very well.
38. The research found that if you took a sampling of 20 evangelical churches **only three out of twenty churches were growing**. 17 of twenty churches were either staying the same or they were declining in attendance.
39. Let me repeat that. In America, 17 of twenty churches were either staying the same or they were declining in attendance.
40. Of the three that were growing, two of those three were growing because they were drawing people from the seventeen churches that are declining.
41. **Only one in 20 churches was actually growing because they were seeing lost people saved.**
42. You say why is that pastor? Well my guess is that like the Jews that were selling animals and exchanging money in the temple courts many churches had lost sight of the very reason why they are supposed to exist.

43. Again there wasn't anything technically wrong with where they were transacting business, it's just that transacting business and taking advantage of their brothers was not the point and it wasn't the reason why God had established the temple.
44. God had established the temple as a place of worship and some of the people had missed that.
45. Now let's fast forward to the post pandemic church. I don't have any hard data. I am not aware of any specific research that has been conducted.
46. But in the last several months I have tried to talk to as many pastors as I can, including a friend who talks to several pastors a week, and many of them are sharing that they are experiencing the same realities that we are as a church.
47. Attendance is only a fraction of what it was prior to the pandemic. The numbers of people serving in the local church has decreased significantly.
48. In almost every church, giving has remained strong, but I can't tell you the number of times I have heard the statement, our church isn't even the same church.
49. If you were to look at us before Covid and look closely again after Covid, there are many more things different than there are the same.
50. We could talk all day about all of the reasons that is the reality, not only for us but for many churches.
51. But again, the purpose of these messages is not to address a particular problem at BFA, the purpose of these messages is to help remind us of why we exist as the church.
52. Because if 19 out of 20 churches before the pandemic found it possible to miss the very reason why they exist, I'm going to say that 20 out of 20 churches post-pandemic have the potential to miss the reasons for why they exist.
53. I just don't want us to be one of them.
54. So in order to make sure that we don't miss why God has us here as the church let's take a moment and remind ourselves from the word of God.

What is our primary mission?

1. According to the word of God, the bible clearly indicates that our primary mission as followers of Christ is **to Love God and bring him honor and glory.**
2. Let's look at some verses that help us see that.
3. Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
4. 1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
5. Isaiah 43:6-7 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."
6. Revelation 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
7. We could go on reading scripture all the way into tomorrow but the message would be the same.
8. We were created with a mission and our mission is to bring glory and honor to God.
9. We have not been created to bring glory and honor to ourselves, we have not been created to be consumers, we have not been created for fame or fortune, we have not been created to accumulate stuff, we have not been created for our own pleasure we have been created for His pleasure.
10. Now I think all of us can agree on that. It's in the word. But knowing our mission is only part of the equation. We have to also know...

How is God glorified in our lives?

1. If our mission, our reason for being is to glorify God, then how do we accomplish that?
2. Well again, fortunately for us the bible isn't silent about that either.
3. Let's look at God's word again.
4. John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.
5. Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

6. John 15:8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
7. 1 Peter 2:12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
8. Romans 15:5-7 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.
9. 1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.
10. In each and every one of these verses there was one common theme and thread. What we find is that in each case, bringing glory to God is something that we do.
11. Bringing glory to God is something that requires action on our part.
12. It also requires love. We glorify God by the way we love him, love one another and love those who are lost.
13. We glorify God by the way we love, not just by what we believe.
14. Let me repeat that again. According to the word of God our mission is to bring God glory.
15. And according to the word of God we do that by being obedient to do what he has called us to do which is love. Love him, love others and love the lost.
16. That my friend is why we exist as believers and that is why the church exists. To bring God glory and to carry out his work of loving.
17. But that brings us to another question.

What happens when we lose sight of our mission?

1. What happens when we are no longer doing what we were intended to do?
2. Oh well pastor that can't happen. Oh yes my friend it can happen. It happened in Mark 11. That's exactly why Jesus became so upset.
3. Their mission was not to exchange money, their mission was not to sell animals, their mission was to assist people in worshipping the one true God.

4. Again, it was not bad to do those things because God had given them permission to do so, it's just that they had made selling and trading more important than glorifying God.
5. Post-pandemic, post-November elections, post masks and social distancing and differences of opinion that have served over the last 17 months to bring some of the most un-precedented division and anger and hatred in recent history, we need to not kid ourselves that the mission of the church has taken a back seat and been put on the back burner.
6. Not being critical, just trying to be realistic. And one of the major reasons for this realism is that when we lose sight of what our mission is a couple of things occur.
7. First of all we put ourselves in a place to be snapped back to reality by God. And when he snaps us back to reality it is seldom nice and pretty.
8. It usually resembles something like Jesus driving out and overturning and scattering and rebuking.
9. I have been saying for years that Jesus may have been good, but he was not always nice.
10. And that truth may cause us to wonder. Why would Jesus act this way?
11. He acted that way because if we come to the place where we have lost focus of our mission to glorify God then we will begin to die spiritually.
12. Let me repeat that. Loss of mission always leads to spiritual death.
13. Robert Quinn has said... Ultimately, deep change, whether at the personal or the organizational level, is a spiritual process. Loss of alignment occurs when, for whatever reason, we begin to pursue the wrong end. As time passes, something inside us starts to wither. We lose our vitality and begin to work from sheer discipline. Our energy is not naturally replenished, and we experience no joy in what we do. We are experiencing slow death.
14. Albert Einstein was quoted as saying... One of Mankind's greatest problems is not the perfection of means, but a confusion of ends.
15. When we lose sight of why we exist then we lose all sense of where we are headed.

16. Let's go back to the information I gave you about evangelical churches in America.
17. If God's word is explicitly clear that Jesus is interested most in the salvation of the lost but only one in twenty churches were growing because of the salvation of the lost pre-pandemic, and it could be that it's even worse post-pandemic, then what has happened?
18. Among other things, what has happened is that the church has lost sight of why God placed us there.
19. One of the things that has happened in the church of America is that we have become so preoccupied with so many other things, that it is seemingly irrelevant if we reach the end that God had in mind which is to glorify him.
20. If we are not careful, we can become so focused on so many other things that it doesn't even matter anymore if people are coming to Jesus.
21. I repeat again, it's not about us...it's about Jesus.

Conclusion:

1. Our purpose for being the church is not to glorify ourselves and please ourselves, it is to please Jesus.
2. And Jesus is most pleased when people are freely coming to him.
3. I am guilty. I confess to you I am guilty. If I'm not careful I can become so busy with church stuff that I forget that what God cares about most people are coming to Jesus.
4. If I'm not careful I can forget that people don't know Jesus.
5. Friend, people are lost without Jesus. People in our city and our county don't know Jesus.
6. And the beginning place to people finding Jesus is for us to come humbly before the Lord and ask him to show us if we have, and if so where we have become sidetracked.
7. I believe every person here wants to please the Lord. And the best way we can please him is to make it about him.
8. Can we take a moment to end this service by doing a couple of things?
9. Let's ask God to help us glorify him?

10. Let's remind ourselves that God is glorified when lost people come to him. Help us never lose sight of the fact that people are lost.
11. Let's allow him to do an examination of us to see if we have become pre-occupied with other things.
12. If so, confess our failure and repent.
13. Ask God to show us how to start on a new path. To get a fresh start.