

February 8, 2009

Delighting in God through Jesus Christ, Spreading His Joy through the Gospel, to all people

Having finished with two of the four books that constitute what we are calling the Heart of the Gospel, Galatians and Colossians, and before we move into Ephesians, the leadership felt it would be good to spend a couple of weeks talking about why we are here – what it is that Summit Christian is all about – what is our vision and mission as a church. This morning I will be talking about our vision and mission statement, and next week pastor Craig will be speaking on Living in the Good of the Gospel Daily.

Over the past few months, the leadership has felt that we needed to have a clearer, more concise statement of purpose that can be readily articulated by anyone who attends here on a regular basis. Without a clear, stated purpose, that everyone knows and buys into, we run the risk of devolving into a Christian social club – gathering ourselves together merely for mutual support and encouragement – focusing all our energy on ourselves.

What we **are not** saying is that the current statement is bad or leaves the wrong impression somehow about our purpose or is misleading in any way. What we **are** saying is that we don't know anyone of you who are regular attenders who can whip this out when someone asks you what Summit is all about. If you are a member here, you have seen, and may even still have a copy of, the by laws of Summit that we call our constitution. And in those bylaws are a set of statements that constitute our stated vision and mission. This is how it reads:

The mission of Summit Christian Fellowship is to exalt Jesus Christ and obey His Great Commission. We want to love people, inviting them into harmony with God and one another through worship, fellowship, discipleship and evangelism. Our vision is to simply follow the example of Jesus and love people, encouraging them into friendship with Christ, freedom in Christ and fruitfulness for Christ. We are committed to win people to Christ, build them up in Christ and equip the saints for a life of service to Christ.

There it is. And it's long, and not easily memorized. **And** those are all things we buy into at Summit. Our primary purpose as a church is to glorify God and His Son Jesus Christ and tell others about Him. Loving God and loving people is at the heart of who we are. We do want to encourage and stimulate a relationship with Christ and freedom and fruitfulness in Him for a life of service to the King. At the same time, we want to be able to say that in such a way that is memorable and concise. And so we have been looking at who we are and why we're here and trying to articulate that in a memorable way so that from oldest to youngest, from the slowest to the quickest, would be able to give a clear, one-sentence answer to that question – one that captures the essence of the command to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves, and that promotes spreading that love to others. And here it is:

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the Gospel to all people.

It is just one sentence – easily memorized – concise and to the point. But there is also a wealth of meaning behind each phrase in this sentence. These phrases: **delight in God – through Jesus Christ – spreading His joy – through the Gospel – to all people** – are like chapter headings in a book. They give you an idea of what the chapter is about, an overview if you will, but the details come behind. So when we say – Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God – there is a whole body of work that statement rests on.

This morning my intention is to take this statement phrase by phrase and expand it out to give us the full sense of what we are saying when we say: **Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the Gospel to all people.**

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God

One of the elements, we realized that was missing from our original purpose statement was **joy**. Jesus Himself tells us that one of the reasons He came was to fill us with joy. John 15:1, *'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.'* The shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and **enjoy** Him forever. I like John Piper's restatement of that: The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever. **That is, the best and highest glory God receives from His creation is when their souls are made happy in Him.** C.S. Lewis put it this way in a letter to a friend: *'It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.'*

Too often, Christian duty has been seen as dull, boring, and tedious. As a result, we have the caricature of the joyless, mean-spirited, and narrow-minded Christian that is the staple of many books and films – and a caricature of a God who sits in heaven waiting for us to mess up so He can zap us. **And that is because we have bought into the idea that anything that makes us happy is suspect.** It is a philosophy that has crept into the church that says that the moral value of an act decreases insofar as we intend to derive any benefit from it. Actions are good if the actor is not trying to gain from it. We should **do** the good because it **is** good. Therefore any motivation to seek joy corrupts the act. And I think that is because too much of our so-called 'happiness' has had to do with **satisfying our legitimate desires by illegitimate means.** We attempt to satisfy the God-given desire for joy and happiness with things that ultimately do not last and run after the shadow of the real thing.

God built us in such a way that to run after happiness is part of who we are. God built the desire for joy and happiness right in. Blaise Pascal was simply recognizing the Divine design when he said *'All men seek happiness without exception. They all aim at this goal however different the means they use to attain it. . . They will never make the smallest move but with this as its goal. This is the motive of all the actions of all men, even those who contemplate suicide.'* Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that our joy and happiness is the goal. **God is the goal, and pursuing God will result in our greatest joy and lasting happiness.** Jonathan Edwards wrote this: *'Resolved, To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.'*

Delighting in God means that we who are called His church, live in such a way that all of life – our living and our dying, trumpet the greatness of God through our enjoyment of Him. We enjoy God in such a way so as to demonstrate the triumph of God over sin and the world and death and hell and the devil. It means that the testimony of our joy-filled, grace-proving lives becomes the demonstration of God's incredible mercy and infinite goodness in the world.

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God **through Jesus Christ**

God is the author of saving grace which comes to us only through relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. True joy, peace, and fulfillment can only come as we are rightly related to Christ. Salvation for anyone comes only through Him. *'For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'*. Acts 4:12 Do you feel the impact of that verse? *'...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved'* Do you understand the narrowness of that road? Are you willing to proclaim that in the world? In our world of relative truth and mis-placed toleration, this does not sit very well. We are told that people can know God through many other means. But that is not what the Bible teaches.

God dwells in *'...unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see...'* (1 Timothy 6:16) And the gospel of John tells us that *'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.'* John 1:18 The only way to know God, to delight in God, is through Jesus Christ. You cannot know Him or enjoy Him apart from a relationship with His Son. Peter tells us that the way to delight in God is to delight in His Son: *And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.* 1 Peter 1:8-9 That is why we say we delight in God through Jesus Christ.

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, **spreading His joy**

Since our greatest joy flows from delighting ourselves in God, it is a natural consequence that that joy be spread and shared by others. How many of you like to watch a really good movie by yourself? I don't know any who does. A really good movie is something that has to be shared with someone. You need to share the joy you have with someone else. The same is true for joy in God. **Joy in God is the impetus for missions.** It is joy that is not dependent upon circumstance, emotional state, or abundance of possessions; but on God who is the author and source of joy.

Max Lucado wrote about a man named Robert Reed who boasted 'I have everything I need for joy!' *Robert Reed's hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. His shirts are held together by strips of Velcro'. His speech drags like a worn-out audio cassette. Robert has cerebral palsy. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at a St. Louis junior college or from venturing overseas on five mission trips. And Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.*

I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." His shirts are held together by Velcro', but his life is held together by joy. This is why we say Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy.

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel

It is through the gospel that people come to Christ and enter into the joy of the Lord. Paul tells us in Romans that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Romans 1:16 Jesus told His disciples, when they asked what were the signs of His return – that is, what were the visible expressions that their mission was over: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* Matthew 24:14

Our mission is over when this gospel has been proclaimed to every tribe and nation and made known in every tongue and people group on earth. That is why we major on the gospel here at Summit – that is why we are teaching through the heart of the gospel. That is why we promote home-front missions and cross-cultural missions. That is why we pray for open doors and gospel clarity at home and abroad. That is why we teach that we have been commissioned by God to spend our lives making others eternally glad in God through the gospel.

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people

The book of Acts makes it clear what our mission is about: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* Acts 1:8 The power of the Holy Spirit is for the fulfilling of the mission. And the mission is to our neighborhoods, our communities, and all the way into the remotest parts of the earth.

We believe that we are called as Christ's ambassadors to carry the message of His saving grace to all peoples in all places.

We believe that the gospel is relevant for all peoples, and all cultures and at all times and that God has called us to risk-taking endeavors to make the nations glad in God.

We believe that God has blessed us so that the nations might be glad in God and sing for joy in His salvation. *May God be gracious to us and bless us and make His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations.* Psalm 67:1-2

We believe that our delight and joy in God bring Him the most glory and that our joy-filled, grace-proving lives are meant to be a demonstration of that joy to the nations, igniting their hearts to be glad in God.

So what does this do for us here at Summit? What good is it to have a mission statement that we all can remember, and recite? The best thing it does is help focus laser-like on the things that help fulfill the mission statement. If we do not have a clear idea of where we are going and what we are about, we tend to veer off course. Chuck Swindoll tells the story one man related of his experience with a church that sailed way off course: *“When I lived in Atlanta several years ago, I noticed in the Yellow Pages, in the listing of restaurants, and entry for a place called the The Church of God Grill. The peculiar name aroused my curiosity and I dialed the number. A man answered with a cheery, ‘Hello! Church of God Grill!’ I asked how his restaurant had been given such and unusual name, and he told me: ‘Well, we had a little mission down here, and we started selling chicken dinners after church on Sunday to help pay the bills. Well, people liked the chicken, and we did such a good business, that eventually we cut back on the church service. After awhile we just closed down the church altogether and kept on serving chicken dinners. We kept the name we started with, and that’s Church of God Grill.’”*

Everything we do here at Summit Christian must be seen through the mission statement grid for us to not get off course. So we ask ourselves: how do home fellowship groups, how does Kids Club, how does worship service on Sunday mornings, how do men's groups and women's groups, how does supporting the pastors of API Kenya, how does supporting missions in China, and to the Muslim world and here at home – how does all that fit the vision God has given us as a church? So our mission statement helps to keep us on track and doing those things that fulfill the mission God has given us to do. And it helps you – individually as members of this church to focus your life, your priorities, your ministry toward those things that help you fulfill the mission God has given you to do.

Summit Christian Fellowship exists to delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people

Our good and faithful heavenly Father,

May we be a people who delight in You, revel in Your goodness, take joy in Your salvation, glory in the cross and make our souls happy in You. Thank You for Your Son who died that we might live, who was all anguish that we might be all joy, beaten as an enemy that we might be welcomed as a friend, surrendered to hell's worst that we might have heaven's best. Thank You for the great promises and invitations of the gospel – pardon for rebels, liberty for captives, health for the sick and salvation for the lost. Help us to live the gospel, proclaim the gospel, walk in the joy of the gospel and live as those who have been made happy in God and do all to make others happy in You we pray in the precious and joy-giving name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***