

We are continuing our focus on the subject of the church this morning. When our Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples in **Matthew 16:18** that He would ***'build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!'*** what do you think He had in mind?

Let's take a look at this brief video clip to help us consider the question

Do I like the music they play?
Do I like the captain and his crew?
Is the service good?
Are my needs met?
Is my cruise pleasant and comfortable?
Do I want to sail with them again?

Is the ship on a clear and noble mission?
Does the captain submit to a higher authority?
Are the crew members equipped to succeed?
Are they able to contribute in significant ways?
Are they honored for their efforts?

So what do you think? Does the church more resemble the cruise ship or a battleship? Is the church more like the Queen Mary or the battleship USS Missouri?

Maybe we're asking the wrong question. Maybe our question should be 'is the church supposed to resemble the Queen Mary or the USS Missouri?'

When our Lord Jesus Christ told the disciples in **Matthew 16:18** that He would ***'build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it!'*** what do you think He had in mind?

It might help us if we identified the specific purpose of each vessel.

I would imagine the purpose of a cruise ship would be to relax, enjoy yourself, and take a pleasure cruise wouldn't you? [Has anybody ever been on a cruise ship?]

I would also think the purpose of a battleship would be to be prepared for and engage in battle, train, and be on guard for duty wouldn't you? [Has anybody ever been on a battleship?]

Which would you rather be assigned to?

Honestly, if given my choice I would naturally gravitate towards the pleasure cruise, however, I believe it's pretty clear that when Jesus said **'the gates of hell would not prevail against the church'** that there might be more than just a comfortable little pleasure cruise in store for us, don't you?

As a matter of fact looking back on the passage we have been examining over the past few weeks in Ezekiel 37, specifically verse 10, when breath came into their bodies we are told *'They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.'*

If you read the rest of that chapter and into Ezekiel 38 you will notice God has some specific marching orders for them to prepare them to engage. He has spoken about their coming together for a purpose and it isn't simply a pleasure cruise.

Well, in relationship to our subject matter, the church, God has a purpose for each of us as well.

Let's consider together what the purpose of the church is supposed to be. Pastor Rick Warren in his classic book *The Purpose Driven Church* has concluded that the 5 main purposes of the church are worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and missions and I concur there is extreme value in each of these.

Not only do we teach these purposes in our Doorway to Membership and Doorway to Spiritual Maturity classes; we strive to live them out in our day to day function as a prevailing church.

And yet this morning I want to look a little deeper at the very root of the existence of the church to identify not so much **WHAT** we are called to do but **HOW** we are prepared to do it.

Because if **Jesus Christ really is the hope of the world**, and I believe He is, **and God's design really is to share this hope of the world through the local church**, and I believe it is, there must be some value in understanding God's preparation for us in order to perform our basic purpose.

If we agree the church is to more resemble a battleship than a cruise ship, it makes sense that a loving God wouldn't simply call us to duty and throw us into the fray without proper preparation.

Don't worry, He hasn't.

As we begin to examine the preparation behind the purpose of the church I want to share three foundational truths with you this morning that help form the base of understanding of the church, 'the called out ones' by definition, in the original Greek the 'ecclesia.' That's us!

- We were created in His image
- We were created for and by God's pleasure
- We were created to bear His image and glory

Let's pray together:

1. We were created in His image

Let's go all the way back to the beginning, the book of Genesis which means beginnings.

Genesis 1:26-28 NIV

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Mankind, male and female, were created in God's image and likeness and given the responsibility and authority to rule over creation. They were blessed and instructed to be fruitful and multiply and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Mankind had purpose.

I love the way The Message paraphrases this passage:

*'God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.'*

*He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."*

So even though we might sometimes think that all Adam and Eve did was simply 'pleasure cruise' around the garden all day long doing nothing, that wouldn't be an accurate description of their activity. They were created in God's image and likeness and that came with purpose.

In order to try and grasp just a bit of understanding about what it meant to be created in the image and likeness of God listen to what the great Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote: [I want to read...]

God's image upon man consists in these three things:

a. in his nature and constitution ... of his soul.

It is the soul of man that does especially bear God's image. The soul is a spirit, an intelligent immortal spirit, an influencing active spirit, herein resembling God ... The soul of man ... in its three noble faculties of understanding, will, and active power, is perhaps the brightest clearest looking-glass in nature, wherein to see God.

b. in his place and authority.

As he has the government of the inferior creatures, he is ... God's representative ... upon earth; they are not capable of fearing and serving God, therefore God has appointed them to fear and serve man. Yet his government of himself by the freedom of his will has in it more of God's image than his government of the creatures.

c. in his purity and rectitude.

God's image upon man consists in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; He had an habitual conformity of all his natural powers to the whole will of God. His understanding saw divine things clearly and truly, and there were no errors or mistakes in his knowledge. His will complied readily and universally with the will of God, without reluctance or resistance. His affections were all regular, and he had no inordinate appetites or passions. His thoughts were easily brought and fixed to the best subjects, and there was no vanity or ungovernableness in them. All the inferior powers were subject to the dictates and directions of the superior, without any mutiny or rebellion.

Wow, that's a lot of stuff huh? Made in God's image and likeness?

In His Nature, His Authority, and in His Purity. That's pretty powerful stuff don't you think?

Later on in the first chapter of Genesis, Genesis 1:31 God said after He did all this '*God saw all that he had made, **and it was very good.***' It was kind of a 'way to go God' kind of a thing! He knew what He was doing! You might even say God took pleasure at the work of His hands and why not? After all, He is God, correct?

Initially mankind was created with purpose and things haven't changed. The church, God's called out ones, still has purpose. We'll talk more about this as we progress through this subject this morning.

Tell your neighbor '*you were created in God's image and you look GOOD!*'

Not only were we created in God's image...

2. We were created for and by God's pleasure

We started in the book of beginnings. Now let's look at the other end of the Bible, the book of Revelation, as John describes heaven:

Revelation 4:10-11 KJV

10The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

I want to read a few other translations of verse 11 to help us a bit.

The Message

*Worthy, O Master! Yes, our God!
Take the glory! the honor! the power!
You created it all;
It was created because you wanted it.*

New Living Translation

*You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased."*

New International Version

*"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."*

This is a song of heaven that is being sung and will be sung for all eternity.

God wasn't created for our pleasure and by our will; we were created for His pleasure and by His will. I think sometimes we get things a little bit turned around in our thinking which helps us kind of gravitate towards a 'cruise ship' mentality rather than a 'battleship' mindset and think this is all about ME!

There is no 'I' in church. We were created for His pleasure, not our pleasure cruise, and when we get this messed up, things get a bit funky and we lose focus.

The fact of the matter is, it is worse than funky. Songwriter Michael Card described it this way in his song 'Know You in the Now.'

*'Lord, could You tell me why; was it for this You came and died.
A once a week observance, where we coldly mouth Your words?
Lord we should confess, we lose You in our busyness.
We've made You in our image, so our faith's idolatry!'*

*We've made You in our image, **so our faith's idolatry!***

This kind of puts a little bit of a different spin on things doesn't it?

I'm glad Proverbs 8:31 informs us that God *'rejoices in the whole world and that His delight is with mankind.'* He knows us all so well and loves us in spite of our self and still calls us to His purpose.

We were created by His pleasure, by His will and in His purpose, and for His pleasure, for His will and for His purposes, and originally in His image, in His Nature, His Authority, and in His Purity in order that we might

3. We were created to bear His image and glory.

Throughout church history and down through the ages crossing many streams of Christianity and study among almost all schools of thought it has been commonly held that mankind's chief end is 'to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.'

When you read the account in Genesis, there Adam is walking in the cool of the day with God, naming the animals, having dominion over the creation, called to be fruitful and multiply, given authority and purpose and seemingly doing a great job!

But we know what happened. Do I need read the story? Disobedience, sin crept in through the vile enemy of our soul and wreaked havoc with man's place and position of closeness with God and partaking regularly of His Glory. Separation occurred between God and mankind. The image was marred horribly!

However, God knew this would occur; it didn't take Him by surprise; He has had a plan for all eternity and down through out the ages. His plan's name is Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God!

His intent is still that we bear His image and His glory.

Colossians 1:15-23 NLT

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, 16 for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. 17 He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. 18 Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. 19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

This is the Good News, the Gospel, what we celebrated today through the Lord's Supper, what we celebrated today through our worship and prayers. He bought us back. Purpose is renewed!

Now listen to the rest of the Apostle Paul's encouragement:

21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. 23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it. 24 I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. 25 God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. 26 This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people.

27 For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you [Gentiles], too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.'

Did we catch that? Paul said 'Hey, psssst! I want to let you in on a little secret, a mystery. Here it is: **God wants you to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you too! And check this out: Christ lives in you, do you believe that? And if that wasn't enough, you can guarantee you are invited to share in His glory.'**

That's why we sing 'Lord I'm amazed by you, how you love me!' It's because

- We were created in His image
- We were created for and by God's pleasure
- We were created to bear His image and glory

So what do you think? Is the church supposed to resemble a cruise ship or a battleship?

Do you see yourself as lounging on the deck of the cruise ship Queen Mary or are you standing ready at the bow of the battleship USS Missouri?

Grace Murray Hopper once said that '*a ship in port is safe; but, that's not what ships are built for.*'

