

We are continuing our focus on the subject of the church this morning.

Once again let's remind ourselves what Jesus Christ told the disciples in **Matthew 16:18 NKJV**. Jesus said ***'I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!'*** That's a pretty strong statement. Notice the phraseology here:

Jesus said *'I will build...'* denoting confidence, assurance and active involvement. Build [*Oikodomeo*] to found, erect, restore, repair, establish.

*'My church...'* denoting possession and ownership; leadership. He is the head and we are the body. He is in charge; we are not! Church [*Ekklesia*] a gathering, called out ones, an assembly

*'the gates of hell will not prevail against it!'* The gates of Hades, the power of the lower world, will not prevail [*Katischuo*] to be strong to another's detriment, to be superior in strength, to overcome.

The gates of Hades will not overcome the church; however we should all be aware they will **come over** on occasion. The 'gates of hell's' failure will not be for lack of effort church. Yet rest assured, that God's word has promised us this according to **1 John 4:4** *'You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.'*

Our faith declaration concerning the church has been **Jesus Christ is the hope of the world, and God's design is to share this hope of the world through the local church. [repeat]**

Hey, let's be honest, on the surface things haven't been looking too good for the church in general these days, have they? Most everything you read statistically shows a marked decline in interest in church and a perceived irrelevancy of the church in the life of the average Jane or Joe today. I am not saying I agree with this but many people are feeling this way and some with good reason, or at least with reason anyway.

Listen to a few lines from a letter I received this week. [Read highlighted lines].

This past week I met with a local pastor who resigned recently due to challenges he faced from members within his congregation.

Certainly there are countless numbers of members who leave their churches each week due to challenges with their pastors as well. However, we are in agreement that even though things look tough for the church, God is able and the *'gates of hell will not prevail.'*

Because **'the one who is in the church is greater than the one who is in the world.'**

Last week we spent a few moments looking at the church as either a cruise ship or a battleship. I had a few interesting comments after the service from a prior service Navy man so I asked him to be prepared to share briefly with us this morning. Most of us acknowledged that if given the choice we would rather sail on the cruise ship verses the battleship. Not this guy. Listen to why from Mark Tucker:

Last week we looked at three foundational truths behind the purpose of the church that help form the basis of understanding of the church. They were

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

This morning I want us to briefly visit the first two and focus on the third and finish them up. Next week Dean Frame will be sharing from the Word with us. We looked at ...

## **We were created in His image**

### **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."*

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!

In His image and His likeness. This is no small thing!

## **We were created for and by His pleasure**

### **Revelation 4:10-11 KJV**

*10 The 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.'*

### **New Living Translation [verse 11]**

*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."*

This is the 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'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 bear His image and glory.

## **We were created to bear His image and glory**

This is where I want to dwell this morning.

Throughout church history and down through the ages crossing many streams of Christianity 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!

Let's continue where we left off in **Genesis 1:29-30 NIV**

*'Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.'*

God created mankind in His image, by His will and for His pleasure and bestowed authority and responsibility upon them to have dominion, to be fruitful and multiply, to bear His image and glory. In other words **TO PREVAIL!** Not just simply to exist!

Let's read more of the story of God's intent for mankind in Genesis 2. Genesis 2 is basically an appendix of the story with more details of the history of creation with a particular emphasis upon mankind.

**Genesis 2:15-25 NIV**

*15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

*18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

*19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.*

*21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

*23 The man said,*

*"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'  
for she was taken out of man."*

*24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

*25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

Isn't that awesome? What innocence, purity, purpose, responsibility and raw power of God's original intent and purpose! The way things were meant to be!

Verse 15 informs us that '*the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.***'

He placed Adam in the garden to work it, **abad**, which means to serve, to labor for another; and to care for it, **Shamar** which means to keep, to guard, to observe, to give heed, to have charge of. Mankind had divine purpose written all over him at creation!

Don't read through this passage too fast though and inadvertently ignore the power contained in those last few words in verse 25 '**they felt no shame.**' Not only was there no sin, no sickness, no sorrow; there was no shame! Oh, that's powerful!

Shame is defined as ... a negative emotion that combines feelings of dishonor, unworthiness, and embarrassment. [Encarta Dictionary]. There was no reason for shame!

Imagine a life free from 'feelings of dishonor, unworthiness, and embarrassment.' Would you want that? The Psalmist did in ...

**Psalm 31:1** '*In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.*'

It wasn't too long however before sin in the form of disobedience crept in through the vile enemy of our soul and wreaked havoc with man's place, purpose and position of closeness with God and partaking regularly of His Glory. Separation occurred between God and mankind. Something went horribly wrong! Man's nature was marred beyond recognition. In fact my Bible subtitles Genesis 3 'The Fall of Man' in which we forfeited His glory. Let's read:

### **Genesis 3 NIV**

*1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

*2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "*

4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

This is tragedy of tragedies. **Romans 5:19** tells us '*by one man's disobedience many were made sinners.*' That would be you and me and all mankind.

Adam and Eve forfeited all that God had created them to be and to do through their sinful act. Now, instead of caring and working they are covering and hiding.

Separation from an intimate relationship with God was achieved by one single act of sinful disobedience. Let's read on to get the whole picture:

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

They went from a place in paradise of having no shame to hiding from their Creator and we have been hiding from God ever since. **This is the story of our fall from glory. This is us!**

However, God continued to call out to Adam and He continues to call out to us as well, because in spite of our selves God still desires for mankind to bear His image and show His glory through us.

9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

Oh my gosh! Isn't that the most pathetic cry you have ever heard? 'Where are you?' Talk about grace; unearned and unmerited favor! God is looking for His children and they are nowhere to be found because they are hiding.

10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Fear of God has crept in. Realization of our sinfulness is present. Shame has arrived and they are hiding.

*11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

God is all knowing and He was calling to Adam to give an account for what had transpired. So what does Adam do?

*12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

Men, here is where we got our excuse making, from Grandpa Adam. 'The woman You put here with me, she did it, and what was I to do?'

*13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

Women, here is where you get your excuse making as well, from Grandma Eve. 'The devil made me do it!' No personal responsibility for our actions. It's always somebody else's fault isn't it?

Does any of this sound remotely familiar?

What does all of this have to do with the church? Everything! God's creative plan as He fashioned mankind in His image was that they would **abad** and **Shamar**, to serve and to have charge of His creation. However...

**Romans 5:12 NIV**

*'Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin ... in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.'*

Listen to what happens next...

*14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,  
"Cursed are you above all the livestock  
and all the wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life."*

*15 And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel."*

Remember *'the gates of Hell will not prevail...'* God pronounces judgment upon the serpent, the enemy of Jesus, your enemy as well, with his days being numbered based upon this judgment.

Because he will not prevail does not mean he will not assail!  
Remember, because we will overcome him does not mean he and his will not come over! But God's judgment seals the enemy's fate forever! Listen to The Message's paraphrase of 15-20

*15 I'm declaring war between you and the Woman,  
between your offspring and hers.  
He'll wound your head,  
you'll wound his heel."*

War? Sounds like a battleship to me; not exactly a pleasure cruise!

Her offspring? Mary's son and our Savior Jesus the Christ!  
His offspring? The powers of darkness.  
The wounded head? Jesus striking and destroying his authority.  
The wounded heel? The piercing of Jesus' feet on the cross.

*16 He told the Woman:  
"I'll multiply your pains in childbirth;  
you'll give birth to your babies in pain.  
You'll want to please your husband,  
but he'll lord it over you."*

*17-19 He told the Man:  
"Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree  
That I commanded you not to eat from, 'Don't eat from this tree,'  
The very ground is cursed because of you; getting food from the  
ground will be as painful as having babies is for your wife; you'll be  
working in pain all your life long.  
The ground will sprout thorns and weeds,  
you'll get your food the hard way,  
Planting and tilling and harvesting,  
sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,  
Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;  
you started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt."*

We can cover all the implications of these verses at another time. Suffice it to say that things got a whole lot tougher. Let's wrap this up. Let's just say things are not looking too good, but hope arises! God's plan of bearing His image through mankind will not be thwarted!

*20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*

Here is where the good news comes in. In response to the sinful disobedient actions of Adam and Eve, their loving Creator, God, still desires to have a relationship with them. Yet their sin demands an accounting for. Something must be done.

**Hebrew 9:22 NIV** *'...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.'*

So God puts to death an animal and fashions a covering from their skin, leather, in order to cover their nakedness, their sin. The innocent shed its blood for the guilty. Adam and Eve's attempt to cover up with fig leaves had no power. God had to provide a suitable sacrifice for their sinfulness.

Just as God had to provide a suitable sacrifice for Adam and Eve's sinfulness, so too He had to provide a suitable sacrifice for all mankind's sinfulness as well. That's you and me.

Folks, we are all still hiding in our sinfulness behind empty and powerless fig leaves when we attempt to cover ourselves or really, just avoid God altogether, and God is calling 'where are you?' Blaming others and not taking responsibility for our wrongdoing will not bring our return to God's original place we were created to reside: in His presence.

This is mankind's story of our fall from glory as well as God's provision for our return for **Romans 5:17-19 NIV** tells us

*17For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*

*19For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

We were created to be bearers of His image and carriers of His message.

**2 Corinthians 4:6-7 NIV**

*6For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*