**It’s About God**

**FBC Albemarle**

**August 17, 2014**

So here we are. Our blind date has led us to this point. We’ve committed to one another and God has brought us together for hopefully many years to come. So, today marks a new beginning. It is a new beginning for First Baptist as much as it is for me. Much prayer has led us to this point. As I considered how to begin our journey together, I figured it would be good to start with defining who we are and who we will strive to be as a church. Without knowing who we are, we don’t have much chance of figuring out the direction we should head. So we begin today focusing on the purpose of why we gather together as First Baptist Church as the first of a five-part series entitled “This Is Who We Are.”

So who are we? Why do we gather together each week? Why do we get up, put on our Sunday best, struggle with our the kids to get them dressed and hurry into church just in time to be ten minutes late to Sunday School? Why do we go through the hassle? Ultimately, these questions can be answered simply with “It’s About God!”

Today’s text gives us a clue about why we gather together. Psalm 67 is a song Israelites often sung in worship. It is a song of thanksgiving for God’s salvation and his many blessings. The first verse is a plea for God’s continued favor. “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us.” Those that have gathered recognize that every good gift came from God. They had already received many blessings from God and they desired more of the same. This may seem a little self-centered until we find the motive of the plea found in verses 2-5. The Israelites understood that the blessings were not just for their own consumption and enjoyment but it was to be the springboard for God to be exalted throughout all nations so that all will know of God’s salvation. “so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.” Because of God’s goodness to the Israelites, all nations would come to know of God’s love and justice. The people’s praise would resound throughout the land and God would be lifted up. Finally, the last two verses reflect the result that would come from this bold request. Because the psalmist knew the gracious and merciful nature of God and because he knew his motive in seeking God’s blessing was pure, he had confidence that God would indeed hear his prayer.

So, just as the Israelites gathered in worship to boldly ask God for his blessings, we gather each week to do the same. We exist to worship God. This doesn’t mean we should simply sit in this sanctuary 24/7 and worship. Our lives should be a reflection of God in our lives. That is why Paul pleads with Christ-followers to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God for this is our spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1) We worship God for not what he can do for us but for what he has already done for us. Think for a minute of God’s blessings in your life today. When given a chance, most of us can name blessings such as salvation, health, relationships, material possessions and the like. God’s blessings are too numerous to count when we take a moment to consider them. There is no doubt that God is worthy of our worship because of his blessings in our lives. However, giving God the glory for his many blessings is just scratching the surface of our worship.

N.T.Wright, in his book *Simply Jesus*, writes “Christian worship declares that Jesus is Lord and that therefore, by strong implication, nobody else is. What’s more, it doesn’t just declare it as something to be believed, like the fact the sun is hot or the sea wet. It commits the worshipper to allegiance, to following this Jesus, to being shaped and directed by him. Worshipping the God we see in Jesus orients our whole being, our imagination, our will, our hopes, and our fears away from the world.” Because of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, we gather to worship a God who offers us salvation, not just for the life after but salvation for here and now.

Think about the implication of you engaging in worship this morning. Worship is more than just coming, sitting through a ritual and leaving it behind, not to be thought of until the same time next week. You are saying that as a follower of Jesus, you are willing to allow God to orient your whole being…who you are, what you do, how you go about interacting with others, even your hopes for the future. You relinquish the right to call the shots in your own life and you place them in the hands of your Creator who obviously desires the very best in your life. We don’t gather together each week to simply sing a few songs, here a good word and leave feeling as if we’ve met our obligations for the week so that God will bless us. We come to worship to be reminded of God’s goodness, to give thanks and honor for the blessings in our lives and to recommit ourselves to participating in building of his kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Worship is more than simply giving thanks…it is continually giving ourselves to our Creator and Lord.

So as a church, the body of Christ, we gather in worship because we recognize the blessings in our lives. But just as the Israelites pled for blessings in order for God to be exalted in all nations, we ask for God’s blessings in order for us to share them with our neighbors in order for God’s name to be lifted up. The second purpose of the church is to carry out the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The Great Commission goes far beyond what many people have dubbed as evangelism. It is more than just telling people about Jesus. It is more than helping people to have “fire insurance.” The Great Commission is based on the first phrase that we often forget, “Go and make disciples.” The Gospel is rooted in discipleship, not just being “saved.” Dallas Willard wrote, “Jesus is about the redemption of actual life from actual sin. It is by entering into his life, which is still ongoing on earth, that we are delivered from actual sin. The New Testament is absolutely clear on this. You just take Colossians 3, Philippians 3, 1 John and Titus 3. All make it clear that the righteousness which is by faith is a matter of being delivered from the evil that is around us in action and that we are in danger of falling into ourselves.” Willard defined a disciple as: “a person who has decided that the most important thing in their life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do. A disciple is not a person who has things under control, or knows a lot of things. Disciples simply are people who are constantly revising their affairs to carry through on their decision to follow Jesus.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Are you a disciple? Are you a person who has decided that the most important thing in your life is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do? Are you constantly assessing your words, actions and thoughts? Are you constantly revising your affairs to carry through on your decision to follow Jesus?

So here is how we carry out the Great Commission: As we align our lives with what we find in the Bible and we encourage others to do the same. No matter where we are, what we are doing, we should always point others to Jesus and his teachings. We live life together with Christians and seekers, encouraging everyone we meet and spend time with to love God, follow the teachings of Scripture and share our faith stories together. It doesn’t require a program or special training. It simply requires recognition of God’s blessings and sharing the excitement of the blessings with others. Making disciples is a natural outflow of what God is doing in our own lives.

Finally, just as the psalmist was confident that the prayer would be answered, we also stand with confidence that God will see our pure desires and pour out his blessings so his name can be lifted up and exalted. We know when our motives are without blemish and our hearts are pure, there is nothing God will withhold from us. In Luke 11:9-13, Jesus says, “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” So we can boldly ask without reservation for God’s blessings upon us.

First Baptist does not exist to make First Baptist great. First Baptist doesn’t exist to draw attention to itself. It doesn’t exist to be the biggest church in the county or the one with the largest youth group. We recognize that simply It’s About God! We exist to worship God with our lives and to share the stories of his blessings with those around as an encouragement to follow Christ. So with great confidence, I pray this psalm for us as a church, as a faithful body of Christ:

**1**May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us

**2 s**o that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

**3**May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.

**4**May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.

**5**May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you.

**6**The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us.

**7**May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

1. http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=53 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)