

Have You Figured Out Your God-Given Purpose Yet?

August 20, 2017 Sermon

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Pastor Justin preached on the rest which we have in Christ last week. He ended the sermon with a series of questions which, interestingly enough, mostly get answered in today's passage. He asked us;

1. What will God do through you
2. How will you step up to be used?
3. What ministry will you serve in?
4. What neighbors will you love?
5. Who will you bring the Good News to?
6. How can you show love to newcomers that arrive at our church?
7. When will you spend time with your creator?

Looking at the title of this sermon, some of you are hoping that I will be able to fill in the blank spot of your God-given destiny. Some of you are squirming in your seats because you think you know what that destiny is and don't want it. Many of you young adults have been asking these sorts of questions for a while and not been getting any good answers. If you go to a bookstore (Bible or not) to look for help in this direction, you will come up with titles like, "The Purpose Driven Life" or "Destiny: Step into Your Purpose".

One of the problems you will rapidly discover if you follow my original instruction of comparing what anyone says to the Bible is that you cannot find the theology in the Bible of my need to discover my unique dream destiny or purpose. It's just not there.

So let's follow the life of a fictitious new Christian, for some of you this might be pretty close to what happened to you. You have only recently made the decision to make Jesus the Lord of your life. You show up at church and you are ready to learn because you are now a disciple. A disciple is a learner. You are sitting in the pew with your Bible open beside you and a notebook in your lap with a flower pen in hand (if that is your thing). You might even have a tablet or laptop with a Bible app or two opened up and you are ready to learn. Now you are told as a new Christian that God has created you, specifically you to solve a unique problem on planet earth.

And you think to yourself, "YES! I knew it! I knew I was important! The Barbie movie was right!"

So now you are under the belief that you have been created to solve a problem on planet earth, in fact the theology that underlies the teaching being given to you is that whenever there is a problem in the world, God causes a baby to be born. And that baby was you.

Very reminiscent of Tetzels phrase, 'When a coin in the coffers rings and soul from purgatory springs.'

So now you have been created to solve a problem, but you don't know what that problem is yet. Talking with the pastor that taught you this in the first place is of no use. He doesn't know what your destiny is

either. His best offer is to tell you that you need to apply yourself to learn to hear the voice of God. So now you start reading books and taking courses on how to hear the voice of God.

Bunny trail- have you ever considered the absurdity of this doctrine? Think about this, there in heaven is the God who spoke the universe into existence in 6 literal days. When He said, "Let there be light." There was light. When He said for the earth to sprout forth plants and animals, what happened? Plants and animals appeared and started doing what God designed them to do. This God is up there in heaven speaking to you right now but you are not able to hear Him.

Something is wrong here.

So when you ask further, you get the explanation that God has His own radio station. Apparently the radio station has very faulty equipment and He broadcasts on a very unusual frequency. The name of the radio station is "Still Small Voice". And you need to apply yourself to tune into "Still Small Voice" radio station so that you can hear God speak. Apparently God is broadcasting on that station right now and I suppose it would sound something like this;

"static sounds, shhhhhhhhhhh, faint 'hello, can you hear me?' sounds, more static"

Does this sound like the powerful almighty omnipotent creator of all things? Not really. Sounds more like the plot for a Disney animated film.

So you apply yourself even further and go a school of prophecy. So for 5 easy payments of \$99.95 you attend classes to hear God's voice. You will be given workbooks with fill-in-the-blank answers. As you work your way through the curriculum you will be activated into your prophetic ministry by a certified apostolette/ apostle. So then if you after all this you are still not hearing the voice of God, it is your own fault. You clearly have unconfessed sin.

Let's assume for a moment that you have everything lined up and you hear God's voice (you think) and God's voice tells you that you are going to become an NHL forward. Really? I still can't skate and abhor group sports in general.

Then you get told something that doesn't make any sense. If you ask the question, "Is this really what the Bible teaches?" you get told to look at Joseph. Joseph had a dream and it wasn't a small one. This is where some slippage of the theology starts to show up. You have done the training and studying and now are being told that it is up to me to make sure I don't have a small dream. So having the dream of getting married, having a job, watching the kids in soccer practice isn't big enough. After all, Jesus said, "Go and make a difference." Didn't He? (No He did not)

This is how the theology works out.

So you continue to dream the biggest dream you could possibly dream. And then you are told the sure proof that your dream comes from God and is sufficiently big enough is that you now have haters. Joseph had haters when he dreamed his big dream. You should expect that same kind of hate. So what do you do with the haters that are not encouraging you to fulfill your dream destiny? You get rid of them. So if you have a mother who is actually quite practical or a father who has been around the block a few times or some friends concerned that you may be involved with a cult and they sit you down to have a talk with you about your so-called voice from God. As they voice their concerns you realize that they are the haters that your pastor and peer group warned you about. After the meeting you go to

Facebook and un-friend them, Twitter- block, Snapchat- block. Now you only surround yourself with the people that are saying positive things about the destiny that you think God has told you about. In reality you have cut yourself off from any voice of reason at this point because you have been told by God what your purpose is. So now you apply yourself in a single-minded purpose to cause the destiny given to you by God to happen although seems it is up to you to make it happen. It would seem that the God who gave you a purpose is incapable of causing things to align so that your purpose arrives on time.

Does anyone want to get off the hamster wheel yet?

Have any of you heard of or read any of the church fathers? These would be the leaders of the church just beyond what we are told of in the New Testament. The leader I would like to draw your attention to is Polycarp. This church father was martyred for his faith as an octogenarian. He was in his 80's. Polycarp learned the Christian faith from the apostle John. When John made it to Ephesus and was in charge of the churches at Ephesus for a short period of time, Polycarp learned the faith from John. Polycarp was martyred for his faith and we can still read his writings. Do you realize that Polycarp makes no mention of a dream destiny? That he said nothing whatsoever about learning to hear a still small voice? Maybe that part just did not survive the rigors of antiquity.

It is absolutely fascinating when you read the church fathers that they sound nothing like today's vision casting leaders or the faith that they are teaching. Would somebody today be willing to be martyred for their faith in Christ if what they are believing for is a career on an NHL team? Is this what Christianity is about? You will notice that this whole theology is rigged to have a person chasing their own spiritual tail. They will never catch it.

You might be smirking or even outright laughing at this point because of the absurdity of this situation yet most of you know exactly what I am talking about. I would not be surprised that a majority of you have sat in churches at one time or another that taught a form of this kind of theology. But here's the kicker, not only is this theology not in the scriptures, you will note that the focus of this entire doctrine is on YOU!

The worship chorus that should be sung in churches that promote this doctrine should actually be "Lord I lift my name on high! Lord I love to sing my praises."

If you stop to think just a little bit you will realize that this is the real problem. Let's do a little digging in the scriptures to find out what the Bible actually teaches. We are going to study a wonderful text of scripture that teaches us what we were created in Christ Jesus to do. If you have spent any time in this passage please note the format. Is anyone familiar with the term 'Chiasm'? A chiasm is Jewish way of thinking in terms of outlining a topic. It is not a linear way of thinking but rather it is like bookends. Ephesians 2:1-10 is a chiasm. The opening thought in verse 1 is mirrored by the closing in verse 10 as the opposite thought.

Eph 2:1-10 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our

trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Watch the opening thought.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...

And now look at the closing thought.

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You see the bookend thought in verse 1 and 10? And working itself in there is a center point to all of this. So in order to understand the proper way of looking at Christian sanctification this passage is a great starting point or ground zero for the Christian faith. It does a great job of explaining in a very tight and compressed way where we begin and where we find ourselves now in Christ.

Verse 1- “You” that includes you and me.

“Were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” The English word ‘walked’ comes from the Greek word ‘peripateo’ which actually comes from the Hebrew concept and word ‘halak’. The word literally means ‘how one conducts one’s own life’. We have heard this word so many times in our reading of the scriptures. You may have possibly asked or been asked, “How is your Christian walk?” We use this word because it is a Biblical concept. However were you familiar with the fact that it has a meaning? It has to do with how you conduct your life.

So before Christ came and raised us into new life, we were physically born spiritually dead. Dead doesn’t mean mostly dead, this is not something from a Monty Python sketch where, “I’m not dead yet”. You were actually stone cold dead and what’s wonderful in this text is that it tells us exactly Who raised us.

So, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”, how you conducted your life. How does that look then?

“Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

In these opening verses we get to see God’s diagnosis of our problem. This is the real problem. Humanity does not suffer from a lack of purpose or destiny or self-esteem. Humanity suffers from being dead in trespasses and sins. Being born under the dominion of darkness we are therefore bent in on ourselves. The theologians of the reformation referred to that as the “incurvatus in se”. A good mental image would be someone with a profound scoliosis. This spiritual scoliosis however bends us in towards ourselves so that the only thing that we can see is ‘me’. And this is what is driving our sinful passions

which come from both body and mind. There is nothing sound in us because of the fall. The result of all of this is that we are children of (watch the word here) wrath.

We are children of wrath like the rest of mankind. That will not make you feel good about yourself, not in the slightest. It's not meant to, it is designed to tell the truth about yourself. If you think this doesn't apply to you, you don't need Jesus.

The scriptures are clear, "Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom 5:6). If you are not that, then Christ did not die for you. He did not die to help you find your purpose, to fill your bank account or to make it so you could afford to travel to 5 diamond resorts. Jesus did not die so that you could be significant, an empire to yourself. He died to forgive you of your sins.

Each and every one of us were born under the dominion of darkness, under the power of satan and we were by nature children of wrath, the wrath of God. Each and every one of us knows that if we were to stand before a Holy God without the righteousness of Christ covering us, we would stand before Him and hear Him condemn us for an eternity in the lake of fire. Each of us, me included, know that this is what we have earned, what we deserve.

There is this wonderful word in verse 4, in the English it is the first word but in the Greek it is the second. Forget about the Greek grammar for now, we will go with the English here, it's the word 'but'. It is a great word. Someone described the word 'but' as the word that has the magical ability to erase everything that was said before it. Picture the word 'but' as an eraser. That is the idea here, 'but God'. Now it is important to pay attention. It is hard to see in the English but comes out very easily in the Greek. God (Theos) is the noun. It is the subject of the verbs that follow.

Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, (this one is a mouthful in the Greek) made us alive together with.... That is the verb, it is one word in Greek and a whole bunch of words in English.

Who did the making us alive together with? The subject of the sentence, God. You were dead, but God made us alive together with Christ.

Here is the center of the chiasm.

"By grace you have been saved."

I need that. You need that. I need that grace not just for my sinful thoughts, I need that grace for all of my sinful deeds. Even my best good works are tainted with sin. I guarantee you that I will look back on today and say, 'I could have done better.'

You see God does not love us just when we do good works, every one of our good works is still tainted with sin. Christ has to bleed and die even for those.

But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). He sees you at your worst, not your best and He says, "I will bleed and die for you". This is a payment we cannot measure or a currency we know anything about. This is a transaction I do not

understand. I cannot begin to calculate its worth or even begin to understand how one could pay such a debt.

God made us alive together with Christ.

Next verb, Eph 2:6 and raised us up with him. God does the making us alive and raising us. Then come the next verb, 'and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.'

Fascinating. You have been made alive with Christ, you have been raised up with Christ You have been seated with Christ in heavenly places. God is the one who has done all of this to you, for you as a gift.

So why did God even bother doing all of this?

Eph 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

We can read the story of the Good Samaritan. The Jewish man was on the road to Jericho when robbers find him. They steal his clothes, beat him to within an inch of his life, take his money and leave him for dead. The priest would have nothing to do with him and the Levite crossed by him on the other side of the road. This is a picture of how the Law cannot save us. But the one who is not under the Law, under the Torah, the despised Samaritan springs into action. He bandages his wounds, puts him on his donkey and brings him to a place where he can recover. He even pays out of his own pocket for his food, room, board and care. That is just a feeble picture of this immeasurable grace.

Then we get these words that we should be familiar with.

Eph 2:8 'For by grace you have been saved through faith.' Note the past tense, 'have been' not 'will be'. It isn't you are going to be saved. You are already saved.

'And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.' What precious gift this is.

Eph 2:9 'not a result of works, so that no one may boast.' And this is where many people stop.

So let's give Jesus a round of applause for His grace and His mercy (clapping) Good job Jesus, thank you so much. You have made it possible for me to have eternal life when You return.

This is where the problems begin.

The question is now that I am saved, what next? The door for all kinds of mischief gets opened at this point and we need to continue reading in order to complete the teaching the Holy Spirit spoke through the apostle Paul.

So we agree, we are all saved by grace through faith. It is God, who has made us alive together with Christ, who has raised us up with Him, who has seated us with Him in heavenly places. That salvation is a gift by God, it does not come by works, there is nothing that I can do to earn it; it must be received.

Next verse. Eph 2:10 For we are his (God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for what? Singular or plural?

Plural.

It does not say 'purpose', singular. It says 'works', plural. Ahhh, now things get interesting.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (plural), which God prepared beforehand, that we should (halak) walk in them.

Alright, I am created in Christ Jesus for good works, plural. What is a good work?

Going back to the Good Samaritan- what was the good work involved in that story?

If you have been in evangelicalism for a few years, good works requires you to save up some money and go on one of those mission trips to build houses for poor people or dig fresh water wells for thirsty tribes. That is a good work, don't think for even a second that it isn't. But it is funny that people usually think of good works in terms of putting it way out there and they don't even think at all about what is going on right in front of them.

So what is a good work?

The clue is in the word walk/halak, how we conduct our life. Scripture is quite clear as to what a good work actually is. If we move further on in the letter to the Ephesians starting around chapter 5 we get to see instructions like husbands loving their wife as Christ has loved the church. Wives being submissive to their husbands, and let's just be clear about this, it doesn't say wives submit to your husband apart from them loving you the way Christ loved the church. I seriously doubt there is a woman alive who if her husband loved her the way Christ loved the church would have a problem submitting to him. This scripture was never given for men to rule over their wives with an iron fist. Men, we are called to sacrificially love our wife. Just like Christ loved the church.

It continues, children are to obey their parents, slaves obey your masters (in our day and age it would be employees and employers), employers do not be threatening to your employees.

Now I can hear what some of you are thinking already. You are wondering how any of these things I just mentioned could be good works because ANYBODY could do them!

Exactly!

Have you ever stopped to think that scripture makes it clear that in the very same book that says we are to 'walk' in the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do, that this same letter also defines what these works are? There is nothing to guess at here.

A good work is to wake up at 6 AM, brush your teeth, shave your face, put on that tie that you hate, get in your small car, drive to the office, pour yourself a cup of coffee, sit in your cubicle, turn on your computer and begin to work. Have any of you ever stopped to think that this is exactly what scripture means when it says 'slaves obey your masters'? That is a good work!

Have you ever stopped to think that the project that you poured yourself into, the one which your boss gave you a half-hearted 'atta boy' for. This was the project you really worked into the night for and gave up weekends. Even though no one at work saw what you did, you kind of felt good about the project at the end of it all because you know that you did it well. That is a good work!

Have you ever stopped to think when you finally meet Jesus, He is going to say to you, 'Well done, you did that for Me.'

Have you ever stopped to think about the mom who has the colicky baby who from the moment it was born would not stop screaming? Through bleary-eyed exhaustion, she nursed that child 3 or 4 times a night. She stayed up and walked that child around the house until the carpet has tracks in it. And then when the baby outgrew the colic, it needed to be potty trained, taught how to eat properly, bathe, haircuts, clothes that they grow out of in 2 days, piano lessons, soccer practice, etc. Each and every one of those things done for the child are good works.

And do you know who the good works are for? They are not for you. They are totally for somebody else. These works are not sexy or glamorous. They do not require you to shun or block anybody who is a hater. You do not need to learn how to tune into that Still Small Voice radio station. Instead, all you need to do is read your Bible.

Part of the problem is that from the time of the Middle Ages it was thought that it was the monks and nuns were doing the really super-spiritual activities by shutting themselves up in the convents and abbeys. You see, that milk-maid in the farm was too busy doing her job milking cows and cleaning snotty noses to do the really spiritual good works that were necessary.

Yet I do not see anywhere in scripture the office of cloistered monk or nun.

But I do see the vocation or office of mother and wife and husband and child and slave and master.

You were not created for a purpose. You were created in Christ for good works and a good work is not something you do in order to get that extra lane in your Olympic sized swimming pool in your mansion in heaven. If that is the reason you are doing your good works, they still remain evil. A good work is done for the sake of your neighbor not yours. It requires you to have your eyes off of yourself, which is the problem, and to look at your neighbor and say, 'I am going to help you purely because you need help.'

Think about it, the most helpless among us are our babies. You were created in Christ to be a good mom and dad. There is a repeated theme in the scriptures that constantly comes out where a real revival happens when the hearts of the fathers turn to their children. What would that look like today? Men be warned, I am going to be grinding on you today. Where the gospel breaks out, where people are brought to penitent faith in Jesus Christ, fathers would put away their video games and play ball with their children and help them with their homework. Where true revival has broken out, the television would be turned off and the family table replaces it. A meal would be shared together and then the Bible would be opened and dads would be teaching God's Word and instructing their children in the faith so that they too can bear fruit in keeping with repentance, be forgiven and then to love and serving their neighbor as well. This is a good work. Men, if you do not know how to teach your children from the Word of God and you need some starting points, come and see me after. I have a few suggestions which may help.

Good works can be done by children when they obey their parents, do their homework, or decide to do the dishes just because they are piling up in the sink and mom or dad haven't been able to get to them yet. Good works can be done by teenagers and those in their 20's working at those menial jobs that they hate because it makes it so they cannot afford a house or a car yet.

Good works can be done by single mothers, by mothers and fathers, by employees, by employers and good works can even be done by those who are bed ridden.

Let me explain.

My mother is living in a senior's home. She is confused some of the time and has limited endurance to stand and walk. She has lost a lot of her appetite and is starting to have regular pain. In the next few weeks or months she will die from the cancer that is eating away at her. And she is such a blessing. This is a woman who despite all this, prays. Those who come to visit and those that are caring for her get to see a smile and get to hear about Jesus. And she has been put into an interesting vocation, the vocation of patient. The vocation of patient is one where you sit still and let a medical professional do their vocation in caring for you. And it is a good work.

A purpose has you chasing the wind. Good works have you chasing your neighbor to help them. A purpose has you focused on you. Good works have you focused on others. A purpose has you building an empire, a name for yourself. Good works have you working in obscurity where only One can see and that is Christ. And He rewards those good works.

Can you see the difference now? You are not created for a purpose. You were created in Christ Jesus for good works. Let us get busy, we have got much to do and the time is short.

May God bless His Word.