

The Many Purposes of Life

‘You can tell a lot about a church denomination by what kind of items you find in the changing rooms for those who assist with the services. For example, in the Lutheran Church, you will many times find a picture of Martin Luther up on the wall. In the Catholic Church, you will usually see a picture of Mary. In the Episcopal Church, you will always find a full-length mirror.’

Well, I wonder what King Solomon would say about such Episcopalians. It’s probably, hopefully, less true now than it was in decades past, but the point is clear. And it accords with Lord Jesus’ teaching about being humble. As well as the admonition in Hebrews 13 we read today about showing hospitality to strangers, for some of those strangers may well be angels in disguise, so to speak. Solomon, in his immense God-given wisdom, saw through all the facades, justifications, and self-deceptions that we humans continually manufacture every day. When all the veneers of our lives are stripped away, all that’s left is really meaningless. Which explains why he said in Ecclesiastes 4:2-3: “I concluded that the dead are better off than the living. But most fortunate of all are those who are not yet born. For they have not seen all the evil that is done under the sun”. For as he observed, repeatedly, stating it yet again in 4:16: “It is all meaningless—like chasing the

wind”. Solomon is absolutely correct—life is utterly meaningless, ultimately, if this world is all there is. If there is no God, or if God ignores us, and is just off doing His Own thing for all eternity.

This is truly the point of Ecclesiastes, that life without God is not living at all. Indeed, life without God means there is no purpose to life at all. But life with God, well, now we’re talking. What difference does it make? I’m so glad you asked! Have you ever asked yourself, why you’re alive? Now, or in the past, or at different stages of your life? Have you ever wondered what’s the point of it all? Perhaps you’re a person who has suffered physical ailments for much or all of your life. Life’s been a struggle day after day after day. Or perhaps you’ve been blessed with the proverbial silver spoon in your mouth, well, maybe not silver, but at least stainless steel, and never known deprivation or poverty in your life. Everything has seemingly come fairly easy for you. Having enough money was never a real issue for you and family. You were always comfortable, even if not truly luxuriously wealthy. And you had generally good health for most all your years. Nothing truly meaningful to complain about.

Regardless of our station in life, we all do have problems and things that rub us the wrong way. But is our life just to be able to live it comfortably, with everything going our way? Just to eat, drink and be merry, as Solomon suggested? To have and do everything we want, when we want, and not have to deal with anyone who might say something to offend us or complicate our

day? Is that life? Well, Solomon would answer, unequivocally, “No!”. There is far more to life than just what we see here in this world. So-called success, and successful living is nothing but an empty bag of hot air that reveals it has absolutely nothing inside.

So what are we here for? Well, there was a man with severe swelling in his arms and legs. Apparently he’d been invited to the well-known Pharisee’s home for the upscale Sabbath dinner for the sole purpose of entrapping Jesus into doing or saying something to create grounds to arrest Him. This is how far the authorities were willing to go at this point to get rid of Him. Sound familiar? Like those with Trump-derangement syndrome, that will break all manner of laws and shred the Constitution to try to find some way to get rid of him? President Trump is by no means Christ, but the comparison of the way he’s being treated now, and the way Christ Jesus was then, is striking. While what Lord Jesus endured was many magnitudes more cruel, for the hatred directed at Him came from far more than just people, we can see the similarity, because for most of us, we’ve never experienced such ostracism and hate directed at us. And therefore, most of us have no legs to stand on, no room to talk, when trying to describe the blatant and totally undeserved loathing that all too many of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and our fellow Jews, have endured over centuries, and today, not least in Afghanistan.

But this man, ill as he was, nevertheless must have been glad to have been invited to the Pharisee’s house for dinner. And

did he receive a blessing far, far beyond the honor of just being invited and partaking of a gourmet meal! For the Sabbath dinners were always the best meals of the week for observant Jews. And in many cases, still are. This time, Lord Jesus, after asking the assembled religious leaders a rhetorical question about whether it was lawful to heal people on the Sabbath or not, much like today, these powerful people refused to answer. Lord Jesus went over and touched the man, and he was instantly healed. The Lord told the man to then leave, perhaps to ensure the man would avoid arrest by the personal police forces of these elites, and so he could go on about his life, now with health, freedom and liberty.

Now, as joyful as this man was at being healed, did he now live the rest of his life with newfound purpose and meaning? Perhaps. Perhaps not. The Bible doesn't say. At the very least, he should now have lived each day with a sense of gratitude and humility toward God Who had singled him out with a very public blessing and healed him. Perhaps he also had other ailments. Maybe they too were healed, or not. We're not told. Whatever transpired, it was according to Lord Jesus' will and God's purposes. How the man lived afterwards was up to him. We hope he lived well, and glorified God for the rest of his days.

That very sentiment is, in large part, the very answer to the purpose of life. To glorify God. As the famous answer to the very first question in the English and Scottish churches' Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1647: "Q.1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Doesn't that sum up everything! But it all presupposes a certain understanding of God, mankind, the world, and life itself. The truth is, as the Bible records, God created the heavens and the earth. God is love and He is good. Perfectly, infinitely good. Later, He created mankind. As our Creator, He sets the rules. As His creations, we're obligated to obey His rules. But since He made us in His image, as explained in question 10 of the Westminster Catechism. "Q.10. How did God create man? A. God created man male and female, after His Own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures". So we are given the same prerogatives as God Himself. We have free will, and can obey His rules, or disobey them. God told us, in Adam and Eve, the blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. Hoodwinked by the crafty and rebellious archangel satan, Eve took hold of that appealing, beautiful forbidden fruit, gave some to her husband Adam, and they both ate, bringing human sin into the world for the very first time.

Heretofore, they'd lived in simple perfection, fellowshiping with God every day. They had no idea how great they had it. But now that they'd sinned, for their own good, God banished them from Eden, and shortly after blessed them with children. But the sin spread, like the cancer it is, and hardly had Cain and Abel reached adulthood that Cain murdered his brother. And we've been killing each other ever since.

When we acknowledge God, know our place as His unique and special creations, to live on and administer this earth forever as His regents, seeking His direction continuously as we pray, our lives are so filled with gorgeous, awesome purpose that we can't imagine living any other way, because, frankly, there isn't any other way. We simply have no meaning without God. He gives us life, and every breath we take. But how well do we align our thoughts and actions with His desires? To the extent that we do determines how purpose-filled our lives become, knowing that we are living as God made us to live. We savor the wonders of His creation and creatures, and because we're born into this state of sin, adore the indescribable mercies and love of His salvation in Christ Jesus. Lord Jesus became a man. For us. All so that we can be saved to live, once again, in Him, for His purposes, knowing our purposes. There is no salvation for fallen, disobedient angels. They are condemned forever. No hope ever. But, because of Christ Jesus, when we acknowledge the truth of all creation, we come to know why we're alive. Though there are inevitable hitches along the way, everything in our lives eventually does fall into place. According to God's love and will. Even though we don't understand, trust in Him, and He will bring us through. For He has promised it. Hebrews 12:2 says it: "keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Champion Who initiates and perfects our faith". His promises have ironclad guarantees. They will never be broken. Keep your hand in His. Never let go. And He'll never let you go!

