

SERMON SERIES: “*Surprised by Faith*”—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—10/8/2000

TITLE: “Why am I here?”

TEXT: Acts 17: 22-31

INTRO: **Illus.: Missing the Purpose**

THEME: Before, you and I can answer the question, “Why am I here?”, we must come to grips with whether there really is a God and if so, to what extent is he really involved in this world and my life.

If your life has no god (Evolution) or an impersonal god (religion), you will live without purpose.

- If you are an agnostic (there are no true atheists), you believe in an evolving history and existence which ends in nothing
 1. **“Life is just a dirty trick, a short journey from nothingness to nothingness.” Ernest Hemingway, American novelist**
 2. Paul encountered that kind of existence among the Greeks of Athens— **PRINT AND READ ACTS 17: 22-23A**
 3. Like Paul’s day we are very eclectic—blending a little evolution and spirituality to form a pantheon of nature worship
 - a. Leading to unabashed humanism—the glorification of man and his abilities
 - b. Which lends itself to crass materialism and self-centered-ism
 - c. **ILLUS.: “What are you doing, now?”**
 - d. Which ends up in frenetic effort to save our world, our culture, our environment—with no result and lost purpose
 4. **“The fool says in his heart, `There is no God.’” Psalm 14: 1**
- If you are a cynic(a realist), you have long since become caught in the downward spiral of hopeless and purposelessness
 1. You reject organized religion and look for meaning and purpose in self-made religion (spirituality)
 - a. You make and assemble around you things and goals to trust which come up hollow, shallow, and broken
 - b. **PRINT AND READ ACTS 17: 24-25A**
 2. You look to yourself and your work and your legacy for purpose and you become you own worst critic
 - a. **ILLUS.: LASTING LEGACY**

If there is a God who made me and everything (creationism), that puts a purpose back into my life.

- ***Finding hope and a purpose in a created world gone wrong – READ AND PRINT 17: 26-29***
 1. Finding deliverance and purpose in a God that is bigger than me and this world’s problems
 - a. For centuries and millennia people have realized that *“this life ain’t what it’s been cracked up to be”*
 - b. Yet, right now God has us right where he planned
 - ILLUS.: ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE**
 - Understanding this as a person, a family, a church, a nation
 - c. The season of trial—the boundary that appears to shackle me and strip me of purpose—all have a divine purpose
 - to lead me and others to God and his will and his plan and his salvation
 - **ILLUS.: NOT DISTRACTED FROM YOUR PURPOSE**
 2. Knowing that we have been created by him and recreated in his Son to give him glory and to have purpose
 - a. **“Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and in earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.” Colossians 1: 16-17**
 - b. Knowing that you life’s circumstance and journey; your gifts--abilities--talents; your family background--your education--your job--your current health and economic status all have the purposeful print of your Creator and Savior whose undeniable purpose is to give God the glory by getting you and others home to eternal life in heaven
- ***Finding a God who has a life purpose for me that is “out of this world” – READ AND PRINT 17: 30-31***
 1. To live a life of “*changed mind*” (repentance)
 - a. **The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of his own life, but that it bothers him less and less.** (Author unknown)
 - b. **Change my mind** which **changes my heart** which **changes my action** to turn me from destruction
 2. To live with an uncrushable purpose grounded on the hope of the resurrection
 - a. **ILLUS.: KNOW THE PURPOSE**
 - b. Paul brings the Greek audience back to the fact that purpose and hope in this life only happens if you have the “living hope of the resurrection in Jesus Christ”(31)

- c. Your purpose in life can't begin and end with you kids, your career, your health but must start with the fact that you have life now and into the future in Jesus even if all those other things end

MISSING THE PURPOSE

One of golf's immortal moments came when a Scotchman demonstrated the new game to President Ulysses Grant. Carefully placing the ball on the tee, he took a mighty swing. The club hit the turf and scattered dirt all over the President's beard and surrounding vicinity, while the ball placidly waited on the tee. Again the Scotchman swung, and again he missed. Our President waited patiently through six tries and then quietly stated, "There seems to be a fair amount of exercise in the game, but I fail to see the purpose of the ball.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING, NOW?

At a recent class reunion the question was asked by one friend of another, "What are you doing, now?" The other friend responded at some length but in essence said, "I work." The first friend then asked why he was in the type of work and the second answer, "Because it pays well." The inquisitive friend pressed on, "But why do you need so much money?" To that the second friend said, "To live!" as he recounted his house and car payments, educational cost, and recreational needs. The acid test came with the question from the first friend, "But why do you live?" After a blank stare the other replied, "To work." He was caught in the same purposeless cycle that many others are.

LASTING LEGACY

In *Men's Journal*, writer Doug Stanton talks about actor George Clooney's obsession with work:

"Most of the time," [Clooney] says, "I wake up and feel like I've somehow missed something. Sleep is something I actually have to make myself do—I don't look forward to it." The restless brown eyes usually snap open at 4:30 A.M. He wakes up feeling wired, ready to get to work. His hair, which he cuts himself with an electric razor, is cropped close, graying at the edges. He's 39, but, he says, "people think I'm 42. It cracks me up." There are bags under his eyes. "You can see the years on my face," he says. "I better slow it down or I'll look like Miss Jane Pittman."

Clooney's feeling seems to be this: We only have so much time on this earth, and I'm going to spend mine working. His legacy, he hopes, will be good movies, though his father isn't so sure. "My dad keeps getting on me about not having a family," says George. "He says, 'Name one actor from the 1920s.' Well you can't—not really. Nobody remembers those guys."

ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE

In Albert Einstein's early days physicists had scratched their heads for some 50 years over the unexplainable orbit of the planet Mercury. Newton's theories of gravity had served well for centuries to understand the orbits of all the other planets, but in Mercury's elliptical orbit, the point nearest the sun drifted by a very small amount....

Astronomers conjectured that another small hidden planet, which they named Vulcan, might orbit near the sun and exert gravitational force on Mercury. But Vulcan was never discovered....

But then Einstein formulated his general theory of relativity. When he applied this gravitational formula to the eccentric orbit of Mercury, he had one of the breathtaking moments of his scientific life: the numbers fit. Mercury was a mystery no more.

My life will on occasion have an orbit like Mercury, which for a time simply defies my best efforts to explain it. Nonetheless as surely as there is order in the universe, there is a heavenly reason for my circumstances utterly consistent with God's Word and character. I just cannot understand it yet.

NOT DISTRACTED FROM YOUR PURPOSE

There is a story involving Yogi Berra, the well-known catcher for the New York Yankees, and Hank Aaron, who at that time was the chief power hitter for the Milwaukee Braves. The teams were playing in the World Series, and as usual Yogi was keeping up his ceaseless chatter, intended to pep up his teammates on the one hand, and distract the Milwaukee batters on the other. As Aaron came to the plate, Yogi tried to distract him by saying, "Henry, you're holding the bat wrong. You're supposed to hold it so you can read the trademark." Aaron didn't say anything, but when the next pitch came he hit it into the left-field bleachers. After rounding the bases and tagging up at home plate, Aaron looked at Yogi Berra and said, "I didn't come up here to read."

KNOW THE PURPOSE

A rich man was determined to give his mother a birthday present that would outshine all others. He read of a bird that had a vocabulary of 4000 words, could speak in numerous languages and sing 3 operatic arias. He immediately bought the bird for \$50,000 and had it delivered to his mother. The next day he phoned to see if she had received the bird. "What did you think of the bird?" he asked.

She replied, "It was delicious."

Acts 17:22-31

Paul stood in the middle of the court and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious. ²³As I was going through your city and looking closely at the objects you worship, I noticed an altar with this written on it: 'To an unknown god.' I'm telling you about the unknown god you worship. ²⁴The God who made the universe and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. He doesn't live in shrines made by humans, ²⁵and he isn't served by humans as if he needed anything. He gives everyone life, breath, and everything they have.

²⁶From one man he has made every nation of humanity to live all over the earth. He has given them the seasons of the year and the boundaries within which to live. ²⁷He has done this so that they would look for God, somehow reach for him, and find him. In fact, he is never far from any one of us. ²⁸Certainly, we live, move, and exist because of him. As some of your poets have said, 'We are God's children.' ²⁹So if we are God's children, we shouldn't think that the divine being is like an image made from gold, silver, or stone, an image that is the product of human imagination and skill.

³⁰"God overlooked the times when people didn't know any better. But now he commands everyone everywhere to turn to him and change the way they think and act. ³¹He has set a day when he is going to judge the world with justice, and he will use a man he has appointed to do this. God has given proof to everyone that he will do this by bringing that man back to life." [GW]