

“THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS”
Jeremiah 18:1-11, Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18, Luke 14:25-33
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I recently came across an article that stated, “A new United Kingdom survey showing an overwhelming majority of 16-29 year-olds believe life has no purpose or meaning...” The poll states that it estimates 89% of those ages 16-29 say life lacks purpose or meaning. When only 2% of those ages 18-24 are affiliated with the Church of England, it’s not surprising to see that most of the age group wonders about what life is all about.

This poll amazed me at first until I read what Ken Ham, founder of the organization Answers In Genesis had to say about it. He says, “When we understand and embrace God’s Word, we will know the difference between the truth and the lies, and we won’t be deceived.”

He goes on, “Where do meaning and purpose come from?” Ham asked, rhetorically. “It comes from our Creator! It comes from having a proper perspective on the history of the universe and humanity – one that starts with God’s Word. We’re not accidents, the result of millions of years of random, chance processes... We’re fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) in the image of our Creator (Genesis 1:27). He has given us His Word, which clearly tells us our purpose and meaning.”

In Britain, all age groups report an 80% belief that life has no meaning or purpose. Ken Ham states the teaching of evolutionary theory is greatly to blame for these results. “This belief that life has no meaning or purpose is the outworking of the religion of evolutionary secularism that permeates the educational system and the media throughout the UK, and here in the United States. When you adopt the religion of atheism, you have to deal with the consequences – and one consequence is that ultimately there’s absolutely no meaning or purpose to life!” He concludes by saying, “Humans were created to bring glory to our Creator and enjoy Him forever. That’s ultimate meaning and purpose.”

With this in mind, I’d like to spend the rest of the time today looking at three questions: WHO ARE WE, WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE, AND WHERE DO WE FIT IN? This is all a part of the underlying thought of what it cost us to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Psalm 139:13-18 give us a good first answer to this question, Who Are We? We are **CREATED** by God. Verse 13 gives God credit for bringing life to each one of us. The psalmist states boldly, “*You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother’s womb.*” When lots of politicians and scientists and activists tell us that life in the womb is just a blob of tissue, and that life does not begin until after birth, we see these verses state the direct opposite. God knows us even BEFORE we are born.

The psalmist even goes further, “*When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother’s womb, when I was growing there in secret, You knew that I was there – You saw me before I was born*” (Ps. 139:15-16a). Life begins at conception, folks, and God is very aware of our presence even before we show up. He knows everything about us.

And that is the second part of the answer, Who Are We; We are **KNOWN** by God. Just look at the first 6 verses of Psalm 139. Repeatedly we hear, “*Lord, You have examined me and You know me...You know everything I do...You see me...You know all my actions*” (vs. 1-3). Now, that can be a scary thought if we’re trying to hide something. There is no place where we can go that God is not there, and there is nothing we can do that God does not know about already. He knows our thoughts before we even think them; He knows our words before we even think them; and He knows our actions even before we even do them. God knows us inside and out, top to bottom, left to right, front to back; there is nothing that God does not know about you.

Some might say that that’s a huge invasion of privacy, but God came to understand very quickly that humans are sneaky. Even in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve tried to hide their sin from God and hide away from God, yet He came looking for them. Ever since then, God keeps an eye on us to know all about us. Not to invade our privacy, but to bless us in every way as we seek to follow Him.

So it can also be very comforting to know that God knows all about us. He knows every situation we are in, every condition we struggle with, and every ailment that we suffer with, and every trial that we go through. The psalmist even states, “*If I flew away beyond the east or lived in the farthest place in the west, You would be there to lead me, You would be there to help me*” (Ps. 129:9-10). If

we're not trying to hide something from God, it is comforting to know that He is with us and knows all about us. Then we can turn to Him at any time for His assistance and guidance.

And to further investigate this question of Who Are We, we see that we are **DESIGNED** for a **purpose**. Psalm 139:16b lays it out clearly, "...*The days allotted to me had all been recorded in Your book, before any of them ever began.*" So God not only created us and sees us even in our mother's womb, He not only knows us completely, but God also designates a purpose for us. We are not here on earth just to pass away time in useless labor and activity. Though our understanding of that purpose might be a struggle, life indeed has a purpose if we focus our attention of what God desires.

The psalmist again states it well, "*O God, how difficult I find Your thoughts; how many of them there are! If I counted them they would be more than the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with You*" (Ps. 139:17-18). Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:14 that we are "*the light of the world*" when we live for Him. So we are designed to shine the Lord's goodness to those around us. God indeed has a purpose for us to serve Him, and that leads us to our second question to consider today; **What's Our Purpose?**

Jeremiah 18 helps us to see this. In verses 1 & 2 we hear Jeremiah express, "*The Lord said to me, 'Go down to the potter's house...'*" Here we see that each one of us is **CALLED** into action for **God**. There are special things that the Lord God has for us to do while we are here on the earth, and they may be simple or complex, easy or difficult, but they are for us to hear and respond to.

Jeremiah was called to the difficult role of being a prophet to the people of Israel, informing the people of the Word of the Lord. God was calling out to the people to return to Him with their loyalty and worship rather than chasing after foreign and false gods made of wood or stone or precious metals. God delights to have us follow Him, and He meets our needs when we obey Him and worship Him only. But the people of Israel had abandoned their loyalty to God, and had begun doing horrendous things that the Lord God had never told them to do in the guise of worshipping false, created gods. God knows what is best for us and He provides that for all those who follow Him and obey His commands. But those who were chasing false gods were going to be given up to destruction. Jeremiah was called to try

to bring the people back into a right relationship with the Lord God before it was too late.

It is the same way for us today, too. There are so many who have turned away from God, having believed the lies of the world. So part of our purpose is to listen to the Lord God ourselves, hear His commands and obey His direction in the great attempt to reach the many people today who are also lost from His salvation. We are called to be in action for the Lord our God to reach out to our family, our friends, our neighbors, and even the governing leaders. We are called to be the witnesses of all the blessings of the Lord to the people around us so that they might hear and respond and return to Him, too.

But just like we are being called into action, we are being **DIRECTED by God** where to go and whom to go to. God didn't just tell Jeremiah, "Go!" without any particular direction. God guided him to the place where He wanted Jeremiah to go. So it was to the potter's house, to watch how the potter formed vessels from clay. This was to be the example for the people of Israel of what God was about to do with them. God tells Jeremiah, "...*You are in My hands just like clay in the potter's hands*" (Jer. 18:6). What that means is that God can do with us as He pleases, to either build us up and relent from His destructive mindset when we turn back to Him, or to tear down and destroy us when we refuse to repent and return to Him. We are all like clay in the potter's hands, and God can either make us great or make us nothing. It all comes as we choose to either follow Him or reject Him.

God was directing Jeremiah to go to the people with this image so that they might be able to choose which way they would go, for or against God. As the potter has complete control over the clay in his hands to make a pot or a jar or a plate, so God is also able to do with us as He wishes. We, too, are then directed by God to become the voices of truth for Him so that the people of the world might hear the choice they have, and allow them to choose wisely for the future of their whole lives, and families, and even their country.

God was using Jeremiah to reach the people. **INSTRUCTED by God**, he went to the people in Jerusalem with God's message, even when it was difficult for him to do that. God had told Jeremiah, "...*tell the people of Judah and of Jerusalem that I am making plans against them...*" (Jer. 18:11). God

needed a real life, modern-day example for the people to hear so that they could choose which way they would go. God called Jeremiah, then directed him, and instructed him so that he could proclaim the message of God among the people. So we are also called, directed and instructed to tell those around us what God has planned for us unless we turn from our own wicked ways and return to Him. It's a purpose that He gives to us to reach those in our own sphere of influence, those we connect with, hang out with or interact with on a regular basis. These are the ones God wants to speak to, so He uses us to bring His message to them.

You might say, "What have I got that God can use to tell the people around me of His goodness and love?" Well, God uses your own experiences to connect with the people. Jeremiah was right there in the city being besieged by the Babylonians. He was among them, experiencing the same things as they were within the city walls, but Jeremiah heard the Lord speaking to him, he followed God's instructions and then diligently worked to get the other people to hear and obey God, too.

You see, when God calls you, and gives you a purpose and a direction, He also instructs you so that you can be His witness to those around you. He doesn't just call you and direct you and then let you flounder on your own in the attempt to reach the people. No, He instructs you in how you are to relate to them so that they might hear and hopefully respond by turning back to the Lord our God.

But there is a challenge to all of this and that is the third question for today, Where Do We Fit In? We are called to obey God's direction no matter where it is He wants us to go, and no matter what it is He wants us to say. That is a very tough thing to do in any age and time, because when we go against the ways of the world, everyone following the ways of the world becomes offended at us living differently. When we live according to God's standards, they stand in such drastic opposition to the ways of everyone else that it portrays the evil and wickedness that is being done by the world. Our life will be so radically different than those around us that they will be offended at us, because our life will be openly displaying the ways of the Lord. And it will be showing the blatant disrespect and rebellion against God's ways. So the world will want to extinguish our witness so that they are no longer

offended. They will try to get us to change the way we are living, or force us to change the way we are living, so that their wickedness and evil becomes right to everyone. That's why there is such struggle when we decide to follow the ways of God rather than the ways of the world!

So we have been called by God to become **DISCIPLES** of Jesus, following His teachings and obeying His commands. And as I just said, those ways are diametrically opposed to the ways of the world, so don't be surprised to get push-back from the world.

In Luke 14 Jesus talks about what it means to be His disciple. He tells the large crowd of people gathered around Him, "*Whoever comes to me cannot be My disciple unless he loves me more than he loves his father and his mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and his sisters, and himself as well*" (Lu. 14:26). WOW, that's a tough message! Or is it?

What Jesus is telling the people is that in order to be His follower, they must turn away from everything else and let Him become first in their life. They must put His teachings and His commands before anything else. So the lessons learned from the world are to be completely subjected to the teachings of Jesus. Nothing in this world is to be more important than following Jesus!

Now that might seem harsh at first, but Jesus is calling each of us to LOVE HIM more than anything else. If it is not that way, then we begin to put the opinions and thoughts of family and friends and even the world as more important than the teachings of Jesus.

Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" And right along with that, Deuteronomy 10:12 tells us, "*Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?*"

That's our first duty as followers of Jesus, to love Him more than anything else in our life. ANYTHING ELSE! It means we subject ourselves under the total command of Jesus in ALL our ways so that we completely comply with His teachings and commands.

Unless we love Jesus more than anything else, we will never humble ourselves under His commands and teachings. In order to be His disciple, His student, we have to let Him be the very **FIRST** in our life over anything else. Ok, that can be hard, at first at least. But as we grow into our understanding of who Jesus is, what He has done for us as our Savior, and what He wants us to do as His servants, we begin to see that following Jesus is not that tough after all. Sure it will fly in the face of everything that is going on in the world, but as we let Jesus be **FIRST** in us, then we see everything in the world through His eyes, and through His perspective.

Now, am I saying that we are to completely abandon father and mother, sister or brother, husband or wife, children and even ourselves? No, what I am saying is that we need to make Jesus first in all of our life so that every part of us is dictated by the way He wants us to live and move and have our being. By being a follower of Jesus we have to remember He's **CALLING** the shots, He's stating what is right and wrong, He's guiding us to reach out to the folks around us to bring them back into a right relationship with the Lord our God. That's why Jesus said to the crowds, "*Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*" (Lu. 14:27).

You see, we cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We have to decide which will be the Lord of our life – the world and its ways, or Jesus and His ways. We cannot be in both camps at the same time. We cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus and then completely disregard and disobey His teachings and commands. An alcoholic cannot be both sober and actively drinking. A drug addict cannot be clean of drugs and still using them. A thief cannot both refrain from stealing and then actively robbing. It has to be one or the other. We cannot be of the world and of the Lord at the same time. So if someone tells you that they are a Christian, yet they are actively disobeying God's Word and living a life that is completely opposite of what the Bible teaches, they are a liar and they only deceive themselves. It cannot be both/and – it has to be either/or. One or the other, not both.

So when we choose to follow Jesus, we must put away the things of this world and let Jesus have first place in our hearts, in our souls, in our minds, and in all we do and say. Our commitment has to be

All or None – There is **NO MIDDLE GROUND!** There are no fences we can walk on this, staying politely neutral on everything. We must make a choice, either for Jesus Christ or for the world and all its ways. By not choosing Jesus, we choose the world. Jesus makes that clear in Luke 14:33 when He says, “...*none of you can be My disciple unless he gives up everything he has.*” Any allegiance we have with family, any devotion we have to organizations, any loyalty we have to any political party, any commitment we have to our employer, anything that we could put in a higher priority in our life other than Jesus, has to go if we are to be HIS DISCIPLE. We must be either hot or cold with Jesus, no luke-warm commitment. And that is the cost of following Jesus. We have to choose which way we will go.

And that is the intent on Jesus’ two illustrations found in Luke 14:28-32. When we plan to build a tower, an apartment complex, or a house, we have to comply with all of the building codes that the state has put out. They aren’t there to punish us, but to keep us safe and guide the building process to be efficient and longstanding. And we have to determine if we have the resources enough to finish the project. We have to decide if what we are choosing to do will be completed. To start a project and then fail to finish it shows the lack of commitment on the person’s part to see it through.

Likewise, when countries go to war, they don’t just jump into it and hope for the best. No each side makes preparations with all the resources they have, and if one side is outnumbered and outgunned by the other side, then consideration is taken whether the training and efficiency of that smaller army is able to overcome the power of the other side.

The same is true for each one of us. We are challenged to understand who we are as people of God, to grasp what God is calling us to do, and then to decide if we have the ability and the power and the resources to carry out our commitment to the Lord Jesus. Of course, those whom God calls He equips, so we first have to decide if we will follow Him. It’s a choice we make each and every day of our life as a follower of Jesus. And when we chose to follow Him, He will enable us to complete what He has called us to do. So stay at it, keep following Jesus in order to bring Him honor and glory through your life, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.