

“WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

June 22, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: John 1:19-37; 3:22-30

Introduction: *Story of the rabbi walking home late.*

Rabbi Jozef was on his way home from a long day at the synagogue. It was evening. In typical rabbinic fashion his head was down deep in meditation on that days reading from the Torah. Oblivious to his surroundings he suddenly ran into a wall and a Roman centurion called out:

Voice: **“Who are you and what are you doing here?”**

Narrator: In typical rabbinic fashion the Rabbi answered the question with a question:

Rabbi: **“How much do they pay you?”**

Voice: **“One denarius a day.”**

Rabbi: **“If I pay you two denarii a day will you follow me and ask me those two questions every day?”**

“Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Why do you get up every morning? What are you living for?

Are you enjoying it? What do you dream about and wish you could do?

What dreams have faded or died over time?

What would you like to do in retirement?

“Who are you and what on earth are you doing here?”

Two Options: (see R.C. Sproul, Essentials). There are two possible perspectives on all of this.

The first option says we emerged from the primordial slime and we will return to it - ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But a meaningless origin plus a meaningless destiny equals a meaningless life.

In the words of some Nazis we are just “useless eaters.”

In the words of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre we are just “useless passion.”

In the words of Macbeth we’re “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

In the words of the retired Berkeley law professor and father of the intelligent design movement Philip E. Johnson, according to the Darwinian theory of biological evolution we live in a closed system of purposeless, undirected causes and effects that have created everything that exists. God is not the creator but rather a subjective invention in the minds of those who chose to be religious. In other words mankind created God and not the other way around.

Many attempt to assign dignity and worth and significance to this temporary human existence lived between two poles of meaninglessness, but to do so is fantasy and self-delusion.

The second option says we are created by God and therefore we are related to God. Meaningful (purposive) origin plus meaningful (purposive) destiny equals a meaningful life.

Our ***origin*** is tied to God from all eternity. We are His workmanship. Our ***destiny*** is tied to God. We will receive a crown of glory.

Knowing where we have come from and where we are going is important. Why? The value and significance of our lives is at stake. God's purpose and plan for each of us is at stake.

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God be the glory now and forever.” Romans 11:36.

Os Guinness’ in his book *The Call* puts it this way:

“God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.” (p. 4)

The context of spiritual gifts in a meaningful life.

We are going to spend several weeks talking about spiritual gifts. Many preachers just jump right into the subject but I want to take this morning to give a context, to give the big picture. I want to set spiritual gifts in the context of a meaningful life created and designed by a sovereign and purposeful God. I want you to see that the life you have has been ordained by God and everything about your life is infused with meaning and purpose. I want us to see that that meaning and purpose isn't just about us, but has a larger purpose in the plan of God.

We think far too little of our lives and the spiritual gifts God has given to each of us. And by each one of us I am talking about the student in ninth grade; and the single seeking God's direction for their future; and the mom at home with little

ones; and the man in the barn or in the office or on the road; and the widow in the retirement center or care home.

The purpose and meaning of the life of John the Baptist:

The life of John the Baptist illustrates the value and importance of knowing who you are and what you are and why you are here.

John 1:6-8:

John 1:6-8 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

This is the Apostle John's testimony concerning John the Baptist.

He was a man named John. He was a man *named* by God. He was a man *sent* by God.

He was not the light, he was only a witness to the light.

He was not the one to be believed, but to be believed through.

John was faithful to his calling because he knew who Jesus was and he knew who he was.

John 1:19-28:

John 1:19-28 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

24 (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John was emphatically clear about who he was and who he was not.

They came asking "Who are you?" "Who are you?"

Are you the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One? The long expected one? No!

Then the next logical question:

Are you the prophet Elijah? The one who would come back to prepare the way?
No!

John didn't draw the connection between himself and Elijah. Jesus did.

John may not have seen as much significance in his own role and ministry as Jesus saw.

Are you the Prophet? The one like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18)? Some special end-time prophet? No!

Then who are you? Give some answer. Who are you? Do you know?

“I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness” (Isaiah 40:3). I am only a herald

John answered from Scripture. He saw himself in biblical terms. He was grounded in the Word.

He was connected to the Word, to truth.

John saw himself connected with what God had always been doing and with what God was doing. Meaningful origin and meaningful destiny.

John saw himself connected with the mission and purpose of Jesus Christ. His life was lived for Christ. His life pointed to Christ.

John was not his own. He belonged body and soul to the eternal purposes and glory of God.

John's testimony is a rebuke of our culture and the generation we live in. We live such selfish, self-centered, narcissistic lives. We live such earth-centered, small minded, trivial lives.

John 1:35-37:

John 1:35-37 The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

John loses two disciples to Jesus. Notice his response. It's ok, no envy, no greed, no pride, no power plays. The question comes to mind, why didn't John follow Jesus and become an apostle? He wasn't called. Stay focused, stay connected to who you are and what God has gifted you to do.

Notice all John's statements are clear, firm, direct, bold, unambiguous. John has

clarity and conviction about Jesus and about himself; not timid, hesitant; not conflicted by doubts and insecurities and who to please.

This comes from a life that is centered and grounded and focused.

John 3:22-30:

John 3:22-30 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized 24 (for John had not yet been put in prison).

25 Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' 29 The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

This incident illustrates why it's important to know who you are and what you are doing here?

John's disciples get into an argument, they may have started it. They are feeling competition and jealousy; they are guarding turf and ego; they are seeking to exalt themselves and their status. "That man," (resentment) and "everyone is going to him" (exaggeration).

John's younger upstart cousin is also an upstart itinerant preacher, but John is older, so he should receive precedence and honor. Adding fuel to the fire, Jesus was more successful.

We often compare ourselves with those like us: farmers to farmers, business owners with business owners, parents to parents.

I remember well how my desire for a pastoral position strained a good friendship in seminary. Both of us got to the second round of interviews but neither of us was called. I was striving after something in my will that was not God's will and was willing to sacrifice a friendship to get it.

Notice John's response, full of grace and truth. This may be John's greatest statement.

John 3:27 “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

What a clear understanding that we live in a truly theistic universe.

All gifts, all calls, all purpose and meaning, all things are from God alone. He makes all this fit into our place that He has for us in the stream of redemptive history.

Discontent over God’s wise and sovereign purposes, discontent over what God has given us and where He has placed us is not only unbelief, it’s arrogance that wants to be God or at least tell God what’s best for us.

John meant what he said. Both John and Jesus were given their roles by heaven and John was entirely content. John was content with his role as best man. He knew how to play second violin.

Ill: My role as best man and best man at my wedding.

His satisfaction was in knowing that *his* God-given ministry had been successful. His joy is real and genuine and it was complete.

“John finds his joy, not in grudgingly conceding victory to a superior opponent, but in wholeheartedly embracing God's will, and the supremacy it assigns to Jesus” ((D.A. Carson, *John*, p. 212).

Summary/Conclusion of John the Baptist

John the Baptist knew the meaning and purpose of his life and his spiritual gifts:

1. He understood his identity. He knew who he was and who he was not. Is that clear in your mind?

2. He understood his role.

He was not the groom. He was the best man.

He knew his God-ordained station in life. Are you able to embrace yours?

3. He understood his direction, his objective.

“I am a voice.” “He must increase; I must decrease.”

4. He understood he was a steward of a gift, he was sent, he was not his own. He wasn't panicked or fearful, anxious or discontent.

5. He understood his limits.

His energies weren't sapped trying to be or do everything or something else.
His weaknesses didn't wipe him out.
He knew he was equipped to do just what God wanted.
He was not tempted to please everyone else or seek applause.
He was not swayed by applause or curses. Not a people pleaser.
He knew his physical, temporal limits.

Conclusion:

The knowledge that God has called and chosen and appointed us, that He has made us what we are and placed us where we are is the cure for many troubled or anxious hearts.

A life that is focused and centered and clear is a life that can rise above the storms and winds, the changes and stresses and tensions, will rise above things like a mid-life crisis.

Mid-life crisis happens when you wake up to the fact that the goals, dreams, visions, desires you have are either met and were too small, too short-sighted or small-minded, leaving you dissatisfied; or they are met and now you realize they don't matter or were the wrong ones.

Thinking about who we are and what we are doing here and what God has given us sets us free from fear and stress and worry and doubt; from comparing ourselves to others; of jealousy and envy over what others have or can do; and from thinking we have messed everything up so much that we are hopeless. It helps us see how great God's grace is and how generous His gifts are and how meaningful His purposes are.

As we think about spiritual gifts these next week's let's see them in the context of God's purposes for our lives in the midst of His great redemptive plans.

Hear the joy and triumph of Ephesians 1:3-6:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”