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Series: The Fulfilment of God's Purposes
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THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PURPOSES— SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This message is the first of a new series—The Fulfilment of God's purposes. This subject is immense and is of vital importance to all Christians who desire to live meaningfully and effectively. I will first outline the approach I will take in this series of messages.

Approach to series

I will begin by giving you an idea of the scope and significance of the issues we will be considering and how a Christian should approach the basic issues of life. This is the subject matter for this message.

I will then address the issue: What does the Scriptures say about God's purposes and the fulfilment of God's purposes? How are the major issues of life related to this subject? This will enable us to have an integrated, total approach to life. I will attempt to show you that the Scriptures speaks with clarity on this subject and anyone who is willing should be able to satisfy himself that this is what the Scriptures teaches.

I will show that there is a key word in the Scriptures that can help us to understand the heart of God concerning the fulfilment of His purposes. Paying attention to the relevant verses and contexts where this key word appears can shed light on God's revelation of what is in His heart. It is like a golden thread weaving the major strands of this all-important subject into a coherent, beautiful picture.

I will then go on to consider with you in detail God's purposes and how He seeks to accomplish them. This will be the main body of this series of messages. In it, we will consider what our part is and how God wants us to fulfil it. To understand the whole subject properly, we need to know and bear in mind two important points:

- a. Why God created man
- b. Our present context

God has a purpose when He created man in His own image, and this purpose remains even after the Fall which took place in Genesis 3. However, to carry out our part well, we need to know the historical context and the phase we are in in the fulfilment of God's purposes. Our present context is different from that of Adam and Eve in the

Garden of Eden. It is also different from those who lived before the first coming of Christ.

We are now living in a fallen world, where the evil one and the forces of darkness are actively at work and the spirit of the world is very pervasive. Christ has died and has been resurrected. The New Covenant has been established, and the Holy Spirit poured out. We are looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. This is the context we are now in, and the context in which God's purposes are being fulfilled.

Scope and significance

In this series of messages, I intend to consider with you the fundamental issues of life. What is life all about? What should be our goal in life? What should we channel our time, our energy, our resources towards? How should we go about it? How can we attain to a life that is truly satisfying?

If you reflect on it, you will agree with me that these are the fundamental questions of life, and it is important we have a good understanding of these issues. Have you ever seriously pondered over these basic issues of life? Are you satisfied that you have reasonable and wholesome answers to these basic questions?

Heavenly vision

In his defence before King Agrippa, the apostle Paul testified:

Acts 26:19

"So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Paul had a heavenly vision. It was not something he made up, or something he heard from others. It was from God. But what was Paul's vision? What was his goal? What did he concentrate on? What did he channel his time, his energy and resources towards? At the heart of it, his vision had to do with God's purposes and their fulfilment.

Are you motivated by a heavenly vision? Do you have one? Or are you setting your own goals and committing yourself to accomplishing them? Many in the world are encouraged to set their own goals in life. They are constantly being urged: "Don't live life without goals. Make goals. Make plans. And then work at it." And many are doing just that. They set their own goals, their own objectives, and then they strive to achieve them.

There are those who do not have any definite goals in life. They just live from day to day. Amongst them are those who find life rather meaningless, because to them, there is no ultimate purpose and meaning in life. Do you, at times, have such sentiments?

Beyond having a goal in life, it is important we have the right goal. What ought to be our goal in life? What are the major issues of life? How are they related to one another? Do they have a bearing on the ultimate goal? How do you arrive at the answers to all these basic questions and issues of life?

The answer has to lie with God. It must lie with God because He is the One who has created us and He has perfect wisdom and perfect knowledge.

It is very important for us to find the answers to these basic questions of life. But we must be careful where we seek for them. If we seek for them in the wrong place, we will end up confused. We will not find the right answer, or one that is truly satisfying. Worse still, we may be led astray. God is the One who can tell us how we can live a truly satisfying life. He has not left us to grope in the dark. He wants us to know the answer.

Importance of understanding God's purposes

Understanding God's purposes and how God wants His purposes to be fulfilled is very important for man's well-being. It is also very important to God. If we love God and want to identify with Him, it is of utmost importance that we try to understand this subject as fully and accurately as we can, and then set our hearts on it.

Sadly, this important subject has been much neglected. Many believers have only vague ideas what it is all about. They make only feeble attempts to grapple with it. A major reason is that the evil one seeks to hinder us from a clear understanding of this subject because of its importance to God. The evil one opposes all that is important and precious to God. He will try to make the water muddy, blur the issues and, in different ways, hinder us from understanding this vital subject.

Many messages have been preached and books written on serving God. Many believers are earnestly and actively trying to serve God. Yet they often do so without a reasonable understanding of God's purposes.

To be truly effective in service, we need to understand the goal of Christian service and how God wants us to serve Him. This is true both at the personal level and also in the outworking of church life. The evil one is unafraid of people who are merely trying to serve God. What he is afraid of are those who know what is in God's heart, and who know how to serve God effectively. This is what really threatens him.

An analogy

Consider a scenario. There is a good and knowledgeable master planner who has plans to develop a township. He wants to provide an excellent living environment to the community: homes, schools, offices, factories, hospitals, sports halls, parks, roads, clean water and sanitation facilities.

The project is massive and complex and building it requires a community effort. The buildings have all been designed to withstand harsh weather conditions—strong winds, thunderstorms, floods and extreme temperatures. For such conditions, the best building materials have to be used. The foundations must be strong, especially for the larger and taller buildings.

To build this township, people of different skills and aptitudes are required. Many of the tasks are difficult to carry out, and the people have to be well-trained to carry them out.

The master planner has compiled a manual of essential information for the project. He is willing to make available whatever is necessary for the successful completion of the project. And he is also available for consultation at all times.

The manual presents the big picture of the whole project. It also shows details of the different parts and how they are interconnected. Included in the manual are material specifications, descriptions of work processes and the training required.

Some parts in the manual are straightforward and easy to understand. Other parts require diligent study before they can be properly understood. And these include important aspects of the project.

The project is now underway. Much money and other resources have been poured into it. Day and night, people are busily getting it built. But all this while, the builders have not carefully studied the manual; neither have they consulted the master planner much to find out what the project is all about and what is really required.

Even the project managers and the supervisors are unclear about the project requirements. Some even have wrong ideas about the project. And many working on the project have not been properly trained. If they have been properly trained, not only would their knowledge and skill improve, even their character and quality of life would. And these last two aspects are important parts of the goal of this project.

Some of the builders have their own agenda. They are not following the master plan. Instead, they are erecting buildings and facilities for themselves. Some of them are building their own homes on the land where the highways, hospitals and schools are supposed to be located. Their activities are creating problems and complications. These unauthorised facilities have to be demolished before the intended buildings could be built, and this is delaying the progress.

To make matters worse, there is a group of jealous and cunning people who are totally opposed to this project. They use all kinds of tactics to hinder its proper completion: disseminating wrong ideas, stirring up conflicts, causing discouragement and confusion.

In the midst of these chaotic and unfavourable circumstances, those who desire to contribute positively are seriously hindered. They face many obstacles and significant opposition. Some become confused. Others are led astray.

As a result, this excellent project could not see the light of day. Instead of a high quality of life for the community, the facilities that have been built are unacceptable. The specifications have not been adhered to. Fundamental principles of building are violated. The building foundations are shaky and the roofs leak; there are fire hazards and poor sanitation; transportation is inefficient and the educational and health facilities malfunction.

When storms come, the homes and buildings are flooded. Some even collapse, resulting in many casualties. Without proper medical facilities, diseases spread, many fall ill, and the sick and injured are not properly attended to.

Let us ponder over this scenario. In what way does it reflect what is going on in the Lord's work, the universal church and our own situation?

God's marvellous plan

God indeed has a very marvellous plan for the eternal well-being of man. The big picture of His wonderful plan and all the major issues and details can be found in the Scriptures He has provided for us. He gladly makes available all that is needful. As the Master Planner, God is always available. He does not want us to work out His purposes by ourselves. He desires to have fellowship with us and to guide and enable us.

As God's people, how have we been responding to God's high calling? How have we treated His kind intentions towards us? Are we earnest in seeking to understand what is in God's heart, and then aligning our hearts with His?

In the township project, buildings collapse, resulting in casualties. That is very distressing. But what is that compared to the eternal significance of our poor response to God's call? Are there not Christians who are busily doing their own things, as they see fit? Are there not those who are trying to serve God according to their own understanding? Are there not major areas that are being neglected? Are there not things done contrary to God's will and intention? What about us? What about you at a personal level?

We should not be cynical or hyper-critical of others. Yet, there is a need for us to face these issues honestly because they are very important to God. If we love God, we would want to understand these issues well.

To understand the big picture, we have to answer some basic questions:

- What is God's purpose in creating man?

- How does God desire His purposes to be fulfilled? What is our part and how should we fulfil it?
- What is the meaning and purpose of our time on earth? What should we concentrate on?
- Why does God place us in this fallen world of pain and suffering where we are swamped with difficulties and temptations?
- What is the meaning and significance of spiritual warfare? Before man was created, Satan and his fallen angels had rebelled against God. In creating man, does God want us to have a part in resolving the problem of the rebellion of Satan and the fallen angels? If so, what is man's part? How can man, who appears so frail, have a part in overcoming such powerful evil forces?
- What is the meaning and significance of moral and spiritual stature of man? Why is it important?
- What are the major issues of life? How do they fit into the big picture of the fulfilment of God's purposes?

An integrated, total approach to life

Over the years, we've seen that the major issues of life include worship, prayer, fellowship, the Scriptures, church life, character, moral and spiritual development, the Person and work of Christ, the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-filled life, God's part, man's part, evangelism, the kingdom of God and the fallen world, the weakness of the flesh, spiritual warfare, consecration, commitment and the spirit of discipleship, and preaching and teaching the whole counsel or purpose of God.

All these should not be treated as independent issues. They form parts of the whole, and they are inter-related. All areas and issues of life, including our relationship with God, church life, family life, work, school, material possessions, use of time and resources, decision-making, being a faithful witness and ambassador for Christ, as well as seemingly minor issues like food and clothing, can and ought to be viewed and approached from the angle of the fulfilment of God's purposes. This is the integrated, total approach to life. It is not sufficient just to have a mental concept. We should have a good grasp of it, be deeply convicted about it and live by it.

How do we measure spiritual health and fruitfulness?

Every one of us wants to fare well in life. But when is a person considered to be faring well? When is a person truly effective and fruitful? Is it by tabulating the number of Christian meetings he attends, the number of Christian activities and projects he is involved in and the amount of enthusiasm he displays, how often he reads the Bible, how much he prays, how much money he gives, or the number of people he has brought into God's kingdom? Is this how we measure the health, effectiveness and fruitfulness of believers? If not, how do we go about it?

We also want to fare well as a congregation. But when is a congregation truly faring well? Is it the size of the congregation, the size of the church building, the wealth of the congregation, the number of programmes and projects implemented, or the level of participation and the degree of enthusiasm of the participants? Is it correct to measure the health, effectiveness and fruitfulness of a congregation by the number of people it has directly helped to enter the kingdom of God, or by the number of missionaries it has sent out?

Is this how God looks at these things? How can a believer and a congregation truly and effectively contribute to the fulfilment of God's purposes? How do we attain to and maintain healthy church life?

God's revelation through the Scriptures

We have asked many important questions. How do we arrive at the answers to these questions? Should we ask our friends and our peers? Should we seek the views of other Christians, or hear what Christian preachers have to tell us, or derive the answers from what is written in Christian books? Do we take the cue from the majority? Is this how we should go about it?

While we should take into consideration the views of others, at the heart of it, we must understand what God has to say, because the answer lies with Him. He is the One who has created us, and it is His purposes and intentions that we want to understand and fulfil. He is the Master Planner.

And God has revealed the answers to all these questions. He has not left us alone to try and cope as best as we know how. We need not ask God for new revelations in order to answer these questions. They have all been revealed in the Scriptures—the Master Planner's complete manual—and God wants to help us understand what He has revealed.

Let us look at two key verses in the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Verse 16 tells us that "all Scripture is inspired by God" and verse 17 tells us that its purpose is to enable us to be "adequate, equipped for every good work".

According to the Greek lexicon, "adequate" has the meaning of being complete, capable, proficient, able to meet all demands. The word "equipped" has the meaning of being furnished. This word can be used to describe a rescue boat or a wagon that

has been fully outfitted, furnished, supplied. It is ready to serve its purpose as a rescue boat or a wagon.

So the Scriptures is meant to help us become a man of God who is proficient, adequate, fully furnished, equipped for every good work. The Scriptures is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness". All that is needful for us to be properly equipped can be found in the Scriptures. But this does not mean that everything will become very obvious to us in an instant. We need time and effort to understand what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures.

While we can take into consideration the opinions and views of others, we should give weight to them only to the degree we are satisfied they are in line with or help us understand the true intent of what God desires to communicate to us and teach us in the Scriptures. This approach should also apply to the way you respond to what is being communicated in the present series of messages. Give weight to it only to the degree you are satisfied that they help you to understand what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures.

Let's refer to another verse in the Scriptures.

Ephesians 3:11

This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,

Here, Paul refers to God's eternal purpose, which was carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is very rich in meaning and has much to tell us about the fulfilment of God's purposes. Other passages in the Scriptures will also shed light on this subject. The Lord willing, we will be examining all these passages.

Wholehearted positive response needed

God has revealed much in the Scriptures. It is vital that we earnestly seek to understand as much as possible what God has revealed. And having understood, we must respond positively.

The Lord Jesus encourages us with these words in Matthew 7:7:

Matthew 7:7

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Are we prepared to really ask, seek and knock? Do we have a thirst to understand the things pertaining to God's eternal kingdom? In Matthew 13:14-46, the Lord Jesus told two parables to highlight the kind of attitude and spirit we ought to have towards God's kingdom.

Matthew 13:44-46

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,

46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Are we like the man who found the hidden treasure in the field, and being so joyful, sells all he has to buy that field? And are we like the merchant who, upon finding one pearl of great value, sold all that he had and bought it? Do we regard the things of God's kingdom as treasure of the highest value for which we are prepared to give up everything in order to lay hold of them? Will we give our all to live in accordance with the truths we have come to understand?

If this is our approach, then we will be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Matthew 7:24

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The Lord Jesus spoke these words at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, after He had communicated to His disciples important truths concerning God's kingdom. Those who hear His words and act on them will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock rather than on sand. It will remain standing even when beaten by storms and rain.

The Lord Jesus communicates a similar truth in the parable of the four soils.

Luke 8:15

"But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.

The seed represents the word of God (v. 11), what God has revealed. The seed in the good soil refers to those who have heard the word in an honest and good heart. The seed is held fast and it bears fruit with perseverance. These words are spoken in the context of Christ telling His disciples about the kingdom of God.

Luke 8:10

And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God..."

In a subsequent message, we will see that “the mysteries of the kingdom of God” has to do with the fulfilment of God's purposes. So these words are directly relevant to what we are considering.

God has granted us to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. These have been revealed in the Scriptures. But we need to seek to understand, and then, like the good soil, receive the truth in an honest and good heart, hold it fast and bear fruit with perseverance. It is only then that we can effectively do our part to contribute to the fulfilment of God's purposes.

Therefore, it is vital that we search the Scriptures to find out what it has to say about God's purposes and how they are to be fulfilled. The Lord willing, this is what I will be considering with you in this series of messages.

Concluding remarks

This series of messages will help us to have a better grasp of the biblical big picture of what is in God's heart, what the major areas are, and how the various details fit into the big picture. We will then be more able to join our hearts in oneness to contribute to the fulfilment of God's purposes.

Many of us are appreciative of the meaningfulness of church life, but may not be so clear about the vision of the church and church life. It is not easy to transmit the vision of the church and church life. In different ways over the years, we have sought to communicate it. The transmitting of this vision would be one of the major objectives I hope to accomplish in this series of messages.

I feel a sense of inadequacy as I seek to consider with you this important and vast subject. I would therefore appreciate your prayer support in two directions:

1. That the Lord would grant me accurate, wholesome, biblical insight as well as enable me to transmit the spiritual realities on the fulfilment of God's purposes and also the role and significance of healthy church life.
2. That the Lord would grant you an earnest desire to understand these things, spiritual receptivity and deep insight into what is in God's heart, together with the commitment to live out accordingly, for each one of us personally and also together as God's people.

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