

The Purposes of God

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[0 : 00] of a bigger picture of purpose and meaning. For many, life now consists in a mindless routine almost of getting up, working from home, making dinner, watching the telly, then going to bed, only to be followed the next day by exactly the same, and then the next day, and then the next day.

There's such a thing as good routine, and then there's the kind of routine that drives you crazy. That's COVID lockdown for you. One day merges into another, and it's easy to lose the big picture of our purpose in life. Perhaps it's because we've had too much time doing the same thing over and over and over again, or perhaps because of the lack of social interaction, we've got into our own heads and become almost wholly self-absorbed, rather like narcissists. We've fallen in love with our own reflection, well love or loathing, you choose. Well, this evening, I want to try and shake us out of that mindless routine and to remind you of something utterly incredible.

God has a purpose for you. That contrary to what you might think, there is a meaning to your life, and that you have an opportunity this week to engage with the most important and wonderful of all tasks, people that you have to speak to.

Namely, to serve God by living according to his purpose for you, which is to point to Jesus Christ in everything you think, in everything you say, and in everything you do.

let me say that again because it's going to form the central pillar of everything I want to talk to you about this evening despite the lockdown you have an opportunity to engage with the most important and wonderful of all tasks to serve God by living according to his purpose for you which is the point to Jesus Christ in everything you say in everything you think and in everything you do in Acts 13 the Apostle Paul is preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch modern day southwestern Turkey and in verse 36 he speaks these words for David after he had served the purpose of God in his generation fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption but he whom God raised up did not see corruption King David this this massive man of faith he served God's purpose in his generation and we have an incredible opportunity to do the same today don't become mindlessly numb worse still don't become a narcissist rather engage with the purpose

[3 : 03] God has for you which is to point to Jesus Christ in everything you think in everything you say and in everything you do well let me suggest that we approach this topic according to three statements this evening first God's purpose is bigger than you second God's purpose involves you and third God's purpose is for you to point to Jesus first of all then God's purpose is bigger than you it's bigger than you Paul says David served the purpose of God in his own generation I'm not sure why it should be but one of the most popular songs at funerals is Frank Sinatra's I did it my way it's a it's an old song but had it been around in 1000 BC Israel David would not have allowed that song at his funeral because the truth is that he devoted his life to doing things God's way not his own or better still doing God's things God's way and of course there were times he got it dead wrong but the general tenor of his life was one of serving God's purposes in his generation now he was a mighty king and you might have thought this would have filled him with self-importance but he devoted himself to serving a purpose bigger than his own the purpose of God he learned through bitter experience not to do his own thing in his own way but rather to serve the purpose of God in his generation and the point is this for all of us there is no greater purpose than that of God however great however prominent however important we are in this world our purposes are as nothing compared to that of God the purposes of presidents and prime ministers and kings they must bow down before the higher purpose of God we need to drive this truth into our heads and and absorb it in our hearts especially in these days of pandemic lockdown

God has a purpose and it's far bigger than us or to put it another way whatever God's purpose in this all is it's bigger than us bigger than us maybe you feel rather like a hamster in a cage eat drink

sleep tire yourself out on a wheel going nowhere but expending lots of sweat getting there is there is there a meaning to it all you're beginning to lose hope perhaps yes but as a Christian you need to know that God has a purpose in all this and it's bigger than us it's a purpose which according to the apostle Paul God has designed since before the creation of the world and because it was designed by God it is infinitely eternally and unchangeably wise holy and loving you're part of that purpose as we're going to see in the next point you're part of it but so was King David who lived 3,000 years ago and so was the apostle Paul who lived 2,000 years ago you're part of it you're part of it you're part of it you're part of it you're part of it you're part of the purpose of God as we are ancestors your father and your mother your grandparents and all those who went before you as will be your descendants your children your grandchildren and all who will come after you might feel as if your mindless routine means nothing but when you're doing another day's ironing or cleaning away another day's dishes remember this you're part of the purpose of God something way bigger than yourself you're you're part of something very much bigger than you because not only as we look behind and ahead do we see God's people serving God's purpose in their own generations but but we see millions on billions of Christians in our world today who are living out God's purpose where they are they're not all they're not all in Glasgow in fact just a tiny tiny proportion are most are in other parts living and working in the vast cities of China subsistence farming in sub-saharan Africa working in sweatshops in Latin America we might have the luxury of being safe in our own homes but many of them do not however both they and us join together in serving something bigger than any one of us namely the eternally wise and loving purpose of God and so not only do we look behind at those who came before us and ahead at those who will come after us not only do we look around us at the millions of Christians living faithfully for Christ in our world today but we look up and we join with the the vast heavenly host of unnumbered angels as they to serve God's purpose in their generation they sing praises they serve him gladly and together they join with us as we serve his purpose back at the beginning of 1997 whether you were part of it or not the United Kingdom was swept by a new movement its figurehead was a young handsome charismatic leader called Tony Blair and it was called New Labour its rhythm sounded out things can only get better for any who were involved in New Labour politics at the time you had the feeling that you were part of of something far bigger than yourself something that would be victorious over all its competitors for those who went to New Labour conferences there was a spirit of of enthusiasm and opportunism every speech was met by a chorus of cheers and people genuinely felt that the UK was on the cusp of an altogether new kind of politics well the truth is that New Labour is yesterday's news but the purposes of God will never grow old we're part of a movement you know which is growing faster today than at any time in history it's composed of our ancestors and our descendants billions of Christians who are alive today and the hosts of heaven together as we listen to God through his word surely even though we're confined to our humdrum routines we can exalt we are not alone we serve the greatest of purposes not our own no but that of our loving heavenly father this is not a time for despair nor for boredom and certainly not for self-absorbed narcissism it's a time for cheer for optimism and enthusiasm for our God and his glorious purposes which are most definitely bigger than any one of us

God's purpose is bigger than you second God's purpose involves you it involves you don't you find it amazing that an infinite eternal and unchangeable God chooses to involve us in his purpose isn't it simply mind-blowing to think that though we're so finite so mortal and so changeable he chooses to fulfill his purposes through us well think back to the life of King David a boy whom God took from obscurity and raised to the most powerful throne in the world of the day shepherd and protector of his people David won battles for them established the worship of God among them and was the first of a dynasty of kings over them think back to all you know about David isn't it remarkable that God chose to fulfill his purpose is through a shepherd boy called David because remember his sin with Bathsheba remember his lies and the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah the Hittite no one knew David better than God did the God who according to David searched me and knew me but God loved David and chose to fulfill his eternally wise purposes through him and so we read David served God's purpose in his own generation back then in 1000 BC Israel God worked through David he was God's man for that time you don't also find it amazing that God could have chosen to fulfill his purposes through the apostle Paul formerly known as Saul of Tarsus he had been a zealous hypocrite and had prided himself on being the terrifying destroyer of the early church he was willing to travel hundreds of miles through the dangerous landscapes of the Middle East just to track down and kill a few more Christians but with such love and grace God tracked him

down and God changed him and now here he is in Acts 13 preaching the very faith he had previously tried to exterminate again in the first century Roman world

[13 : 53] God worked through Paul he was God's man for that time isn't it amazing that God can choose to fulfill his eternally loving and wise purposes through you and through me he knew David and he knows us to use the language of the authorized version he knows the naughtiness the naughtiness of our hearts our tendencies toward unfaithfulness fear and cowardice but he chooses to work through us to involve us in the great purpose of his eternally wise counsel we're so limited but the unlimited one chooses to use us we're so weak but the mighty one chooses to use us we're so faithless but the faithful one chooses to use us we're so sinful but the holy one chooses to use us by the decree of his mouth his will is that we shall be the instruments by which and through which he fulfills his eternally wise and infinitely loving purposes how great our divine master but then you say to me but Colin

I'm stuck in the house all day I see no one I feel like that hamster on a wheel how can I possibly fulfill the purpose of God in this situation surely this is all too big for me and yes we're stuck doing another day's washing up when we'd really rather be out and about serving God maybe that's the way we think or we're doing the ironing while watching a zoom service whilst we'd really rather be at the physical church are you frustrated?

are you bored? of course but in what is a touch of divinely inspired genius Paul says of David David served God in his own generation God handed David a lifetime and David served God with it yes it was 1000 BC Israel but David played the hand God gave him and God handed the apostle Paul a lifetime and Paul served God with it and yes it was the first century AD but Paul played the hand God gave him they served God in their own generations by the time Paul spoke these words in Acts 13 David had been dead for 1000 years and as I'm speaking this evening Paul's been dead for 2000 but God has handed each one of us a lifetime and we're called to serve God with it David did not live in days of COVID pandemic he had giants to fight enemies to subdue and a kingdom to rule these were the situations God gave him and he served God to the best of his ability with them Paul didn't live in days of COVID pandemic he had a mission to manage opposition to overcome and a martyrdom to endure these were the situations God gave him and he served God with them they served God in their own generation now the question is not whether we can serve God by fighting Goliath like David did but whether we can serve God by patiently enduring this lockdown the question for us is not whether our faith can survive a shipwreck as Paul did on two occasions but whether we can serve God by cheerfully loving our families and friends during this pandemic

God is not calling you tonight to fight a giant and he's not calling any one of us to cling to the flotsam and jetsam of a shipwreck God is calling us to serve his purpose at this time in these place in these circumstances he has placed in our way to play the hand he's given us yes even these days where we think that if we see one more dirty dish in our sinks we're going to go crazy or if we hear our kids shouting at each other just one more time we're going to go mad this is the generation in which we live and it's here and it's now God is calling us to serve his purpose and the only question for us the only question is this just as David was God's man for his day Paul was God's man for his will you be God's man will you be God's woman for today for this generation you see this isn't a time for despair or for self-absorption this isn't a time to renew our dedication to serving the purpose of God in this COVID afflicted generation it's time for us to have a fresh resolve to engage in something far bigger than any of us the eternal purpose of God as one of our elders often says to me you in your small corner me in mine or to put it Paul's way serving God in our generation

[19 : 47] God's purpose is bigger than you and God's purpose involves you but third and lastly this evening God's purpose is for you to point to Jesus God's purpose is for you to point to Jesus everything I've said so far is true it's nothing but the truth but it's not the whole truth because I've not yet told anyone what God's eternal purpose that purpose which is bigger than any one of us that purpose for which he created us and redeemed us and placed us in this generation to serve him actually is on the one hand I guess we could generalize it and say from the text itself that our purpose is to serve God David served God in his own generation and that is in and of itself a very important topic right now we all want to be masters of our own destiny our timetables our plans for summer holidays our social contacts our arrangements we all do

God has not called us to be masters but to be servants we've got to remember that when we're feeling rather sorry for ourselves God has called us not to be masters but to be his servants in this

generation but the question still remains what is the purpose of God we are to serve in this generation what is the purpose of God we are to serve in this generation in what ways did David according to this text serve the purpose of God in his generation well tragically ironic as it may seem to be David served the purpose of God by dying and his body seeing corruption he served the purpose of God by dying and his body seeing corruption from this verse David served God's purposes in his own generation by dying and his body decomposing because in so doing according to verse 37

David's death and the natural process of decomposition pointed to the Jesus who also would die but whose body would not see corruption to the Jesus who died on the cross but would on the third day be raised to new life now the argument Paul engages with here engages with here is rather complicated I would take too much time to explain right now but the point is this David served the purpose of God and his generation by pointing to Jesus that's the purpose of God David served by life and by death pointing to Jesus he didn't know it but even his death and the corruption of his body was being used to contrast with the divine son of man the Messiah of God who also would die but on the third day would rise from the grave

God's purpose for David was that in his generation he'd point to Jesus and the same was true for the apostle Paul who once said for me to live as Christ and to die as gain having met with the risen Jesus and been transformed Paul knew that God's purpose for him was to devote his life to pointing others to Jesus even though sufferings he endured according to 2nd Corinthians 4 served as signs of the life of God within him the treasure in jars of clay even in the thorn in the flesh served to point him and others to the sufficiency of the grace of the heavenly Christ so then what is the purpose of God we are to serve in this generation the eternal purpose of God for which we were created redeemed and placed into the situations we are right now these COVID lockdown days it is most certainly not to give in to monotony to give in to despair or to rise to the naughtiness of narcissism or self-absorption rather it is to point to Jesus Christ as the risen saviour and Lord that's God's purpose for us right now during these days of COVID lockdown and restrictions that was the purpose of all who went before us stretching right back to the very beginning of the human race including our fathers and our mothers that's the purpose of the whole church on earth those billions of Christians all over the world that's the purpose of the heavenly host that as one together we point to Jesus Christ as risen saviour and reigning Lord

God's not calling you to point to Jesus by defeating the giant Goliath as it was for David he's not calling you to point to Jesus by your martyrdom as he did Paul he's calling you to point to Jesus in this generation at this time as the elder says you in your small corner and me in mine that's always been God's purpose since before the foundation of the universe that that all he would create would give glory to his son but the universe would act as Calvin says as the theatre of the grace of God you want to know what God wants you to do the answer is right here in Acts 13 36 do everything you can everything you can in this generation to live for the glory of Jesus and to point yourself and others to the saving power of our Lord well what will this mean in practical terms time doesn't permit us to go into these areas but let me suggest that at the very least it means persevering in faith through the pandemic of no giving up of fixing our hope on the risen Christ of being patient with him with ourselves and with others of of consciously rejecting despair and intentionally embracing joy of making fresh strides in our understanding and application of the gospel in deepening our relationship with God and developing positive habits of devotion of using the resources we would have spent in other areas for the good of God's gospel and of his church of reaching out to other Christians and of reaching out to those who are not yet Christians to point both to Jesus you see despite the lockdown you have an opportunity to engage with the most important of all tasks namely to serve God by living according to his purpose for you which is to point to Jesus Christ in everything you think in everything you say and in everything you do use your imagination and be governed by God's voice through his word hold on to your faith reject despair and embrace joy pointing others to Jesus join with the church universal past present and future join with the heavenly angels and yes even with the greater purpose of God the Father and serve his purpose in our generation which is to point to Jesus

[28 : 15] David did it Paul did it your ancestors did it your descendants will do it but will you do it your