

The Meaning of Life

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2 and verse 3.

Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Did you know that 42 is the answer to everything?

It really is. 42 degrees is the critical angle of the rainbow. Cricket has 42 laws.

And most importantly, according to the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, 42 is the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything.

So it's reassuring to know that after thousands of years of searching for the truth of existence, the answer is a startlingly simple 42.

[1 : 11] 42, the answer to everything. I'm glad we've got that sorted. Yes, sorted. We're all sorted when it comes to the meaning of life, aren't we?

We all know the purpose of our existence and why it is we are here. Science is continuing to determine successfully the how of our existence.

The how of things working. But science, for all its vast power, cannot presume to tell us the why of our existence.

And I speak as someone having a PhD in solid state chemistry. Any scientist who pretends to answer the why question, either by proposing his own answer to the why question, or by asserting that there is no answer to the why question, is going beyond the scope of his scientific discipline and needs to work on his humility.

The story is told of a team of scientists climbing a high mountain, the name of which is the meaning of existence.

[2 : 24] That's the name of the mountain. Sir Isaac Newton is on that team. So is Galileo, Copernicus, and Einstein. There's Watson and Crick, the discoverers of DNA.

And I think in the distance I can just about see Euclid, the father of geometry. And there are many faces there we don't recognise because they are the great scientists of the future.

And they've been climbing this mountain, the meaning of existence, for thousands of years. And finally, at some fantastically distant point in the future, the team of scientists approach the summit of the mountain with the name, the meaning of existence, only to discover that there's another team who got there before them.

The Christian theologians have been there for so long that they've already built a cathedral on top of the mountain and they are singing hymns to Jesus as king. The people of Paul's day were entirely as mixed up with the answers to the why question as we are today.

At this time, when Colossians were written, there was a strange group of fanatics doing the rounds, promising their followers the answer to everything.

[3 : 41] It wasn't 42, but it might as well have been. They were convinced that the things you could see and taste and touch were evil. And what was important was the life of the mind.

And not just in an intellectual sense, but in terms of secret wisdom and mysterious knowledge, which only followers of their strange cult could access.

And so they offered their followers the secret knowledge of angels and the mysterious wisdom of divine beings, which had never assumed the evil of flesh.

They promised their devotees the meaning of life and the answers to all their questions. And the gullible multitudes in the Roman Empire flocked to their banner.

This cult called itself the Gnostics, literally those who know. And they came in many types. Those against whom Paul is battling in the book of Colossians had a distinctly Jewish flavor.

[4 : 51] But whatever they were and whatever type they were, they offered their followers these two things. Wisdom and knowledge. The answer to everything and the meaning of life.

Poor, gullible people who followed these false teachers. Because for meaning they received a lie. And for knowledge they learned a deception. Perhaps it's somewhat different today. Our false teachers today use wisdom and knowledge to deceive people into believing that there is no purpose in life.

And that there is no meaning in existence. So knowledge and wisdom. They're the answer to everything.

Wisdom and knowledge. Paul's code word in the book of Colossians for the meaning of life. His version of 42. But of what importance is this question anyway?

[6 : 02] Well of the greatest of all importance. Because if we do not know the purpose for which something was made we will never use it properly. When I was a child my young cousin from Brora that maybe explains what will come next.

My young cousin from Brora visited our house and complimented us on the purchase of a new television for our kitchen. Of course it was not a television.

It was a newfangled thing called a microwave oven. You cannot watch BBC One on a microwave oven and you can't heat up your food in a television.

You see the denial of purpose and meaning in life what philosophers call teleology leads to chaos and dissatisfaction. And the seriousness of this problem cannot be overestimated.

Every human being without exception wants to know what his or her purpose or meaning is. The pursuit of teleology the purpose of existence has dominated civilizations and empires.

[7 : 11] The loss of meaning leads to the breakdown of social relationships and the entire fabric of society. Individually the impact is devastating.

Millions of people go down the wrong path purely because they can't find meaning anywhere else. So they become religious fanatics who stab people in the street.

They become hedonistic pleasure seekers who call everyone who doesn't agree with their view of life haters. they become despairing nihilists who see their only purpose in life as the domination of others.

They hear the voice of the world's loud speaker in their ears. Your purpose in life is to feed the system the economic social cultural and political system.

Pharaoh commanded the Israelites he had enslaved to make bricks without straw. We aren't really so different today.

[8 : 19] Our purpose and meaning is dominated by social media and its imagery of happiness and pleasure. Conform social media says.

Conform to our standard of what will make you happy and what's normal. From the outside looking in the whole situation is farcical were it not so serious leading as it does to the poor mental health of entire generations of our young people and all because they've gone looking for meaning in all the wrong places in life.

Perhaps it's time for our society and for us as individuals to find our purpose and meaning when it always should have been found. That's what Paul is fighting for here in Colossians 2-3 where he says of Jesus Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in whom is 42. Here then is the meaning of life for the Christian not in a set of standards or the suppression of teleology our purpose for existing our purpose in life is a living relationship with a person Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God a man who lived died and rose again 2000 years ago but lives forever and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in him we find our reason our purpose our meaning our teleology let me this morning commend to you the fascination the apostle Paul had with the person of Jesus Christ and more than that let me proclaim to you that God himself the God who made us for relationship with him invites you today to find the meaning of your life in him over the centuries hundreds of millions of Christians have borne witness to the transformation in their lives brought about by knowing

Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and how for the first time in their lives they have found meaning purpose and satisfaction well let me suggest that we can understand Paul's statement here in Colossians 2 verse 3 at three levels the meaning of life first of all is personal then it's public and it's precious perhaps you've tried to find meaning in everything under the sun perhaps perhaps it's time to find meaning in the only place where it can really be found in Jesus the meaning of life first of all is personal personal of course we know that the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's figure of 42 was a joke don't we but less of a joke than millions of others proposed to the question of what is the meaning of life they all have one thing in common they all reduce down into statements or systems

advertising relies heavily upon the statement and the system buy our latest product without it your life will be empty with it your life will be full and will mean something it is really so confusing when at the end of the day the question what is the meaning of life can be answered so simply the purpose of my existence the meaning of my life is knowing

[12:17] Jesus Christ the whom to which Paul refers at the beginning of verse three refers back to that last word in verse two Christ the Christian Bible says in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge when I say that the meaning of life is personal I don't mean that it's up to you and up to me to decide what meaning is rather according to the Bible the meaning of our lives is a person Jesus Christ not a system not a standard a person but you say to me well how dull how unimaginative how fictional and fantastical perhaps you haven't given Jesus Christ enough thought consider with me Jesus the person is there anyone in history who can compare with him we could cite so many examples of how

Jesus the person is beyond comparison and stands head and shoulders above anyone else in all of history so consider with me for example the episode where he meets and heals a man with leprosy we read in Mark 1 that this leper came to Jesus and said Lord if you are willing you can make me clean and then we read something just actually remarkable Jesus we read filled with compassion filled with compassion Jesus so highly exalted so majestic and yet when he meets this poor unfortunate man with leprosy he does not ignore him he does not belittle him he is filled and moved with compassion toward him and then consider also with me an episode where a rich young man comes to

Jesus and asks him good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life we know the story of how after Jesus laid down the conditions that this young man must sell all he has and follow him the man turns his back on Jesus and walks away and in Mark 10 we simply read again the most amazing thing Jesus looked at him and loved him here's a man this young man with everything and nothing here's a man who walks away from Jesus turns his back on him Jesus looks at him in the eye and he loves him you take the whole Jesus the man of Galilee and his character you cannot but be fascinated with him the meaning of life is not a system of thought or a carefully calculated philosophical position it is not a scientifically articulated equation the meaning of life is to be found in this man above all others

Jesus Christ but then consider also with me Jesus and his works is there anyone in history who can compare with what he did and again we can refer to so many examples of how Jesus and his work is beyond comparison stands beyond all competitors consider with me what happened on a Roman cross on a hill just outside Jerusalem some 2000 years ago there's Jesus being crucified not for any sin he had committed but because he's dying as the ransom price for our sin he's been in the punishment that was rightfully ours not being punished for what he deserved but being punished for what we deserved there he is suffering and dying on account of our sin the lamb of God giving himself for the sins of the world he died that we might live he died to give us eternal life and on the cross even in the greatest of all physical mental and spiritual pain he looked out over all those who were crucifying him and watching him die and he prayed saying father forgive them they do not know what they are doing and then he turns to the man nearby on the cross and he says to him today you shall be with me in paradise was there ever such a man who in his work has done such a thing as

Jesus who else has died for our sin who else has died to give us life who else has given his life for us and then consider with me what happened in a garden tomb less than 48 hours later on that morning some woman went to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body with oils but when they arrived they discovered that Jesus had risen from the dead the grave was empty and the angels announced to them the resurrection of the son of God whatever was happening must change this world forever the man Christ Jesus having been violently executed rose from the grave on the third day to new life and before we discount the resurrection as a fable let's remember that according to many historians it is the best attested fact in all of history and having arisen from the dead Jesus then appears to many people on one occasion to over 500 at the same time he gave convincing evidences of his resurrection whoever has done such a thing as

[18:16] Jesus when on the third day he rose again from the grave the body of Lenin the great son of communism remains preserved in Moscow Mohammed the prophet of Islam is buried under the green dome in Medina Saudi Arabia where is Jesus Christ he is alive I tell you how confusing when people go to all the wrong places to find the meaning of life how complex when the answer is

staring us in the face it is Jesus Christ in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge Jesus Christ both in his person and work fixates and he fascinates and knowing him is the meaning of our existence this is the 42 of the Christian faith knowing this Jesus whom to know is eternal life full and overflowing it is knowing this

Jesus which places us on the summit of that mountain called the meaning of existence and why we want to build a cathedral there and worship the name of our Lord perhaps I embarrass you with the simplicity and seeming stupidity of my suggestion this morning maybe you feel I'm showing disrespect to all the endeavors of mankind and all the religions of the world by proclaiming that the meaning of our lives and the purpose of our existence our teleology can be found in only one place Jesus Christ that is the foolishness of the gospel which confounds both the wise and frustrates the strong that's what Paul calls upon us to believe that here in Jesus Christ of Nazareth the son of God is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge the meaning of life is personal secondly the meaning of life is precious precious our text tells us in whom are hidden all the treasures the word treasure here is that from which we get the

English word thesaurus a treasury of words and the question we've got to ask ourselves is this how important is it that I know what the meaning of my life is how valuable is that to me to know what the purpose of my existence is over 3000 years ago the king Solomon wrote the book of ecclesiastes in which he says meaningless meaningless everything is meaningless yes I suppose it is meaningless if you're living in a world without God Solomon the richest and wisest man in the world of the day would have given every penny he had in his treasury to answer this one question what is the purpose of my existence many people ask and maybe some of you are asking what is the relevance of Christianity I've often heard it from younger people I don't need what

Christianity has to offer it's of no relevance to me let me pretend an experiment suppose you gave a young child two pieces of paper one piece of paper had bright colours and interesting shapes on it the other piece of paper was a 50 pound note which of the two would that young child be drawn to and play with it is only when we reach maturity that we begin to realise the value of things people today know the cost of everything but the value of nothing let's pretend another experiment suppose you fill the father of a newborn child that child who's just been born and taken in from the incubator and placed in his arms suppose you fill that father with the question what is the meaning of your little child's life that bundle of joy you hold in your arms do you suppose he will be so dismissive of the preciousness of existence and of meaning suppose you told him as some of our evangelical atheists propose that that child's life this bundle he has in his arms has as much value as that of an ant or a wasp how do you suppose this newborn's father would react the meaning of life is really precious it's a treasure for which the world will give everything to own and why not because money we all know this quotation money cannot buy you happiness knowing Jesus can who was it that wrote the children's hymn I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold I'd rather have him than riches untold because knowing him is the richest of all treasures the lack of which makes the richest man poor the presence of which makes the poorest man rich do you want to be rich not in money or even in reputation or status do you want to be rich in the satisfaction of knowing your life means something you've got purpose in life then come to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior meaning of life is precious and then 30 and briefly the meaning of life is public Paul tells us that the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ the meaning of our existence is hidden there encrypted but before you think that makes it a secret that's not the way [24 : 29] Paul uses the word hidden here he's not using it as the opposite of the word public rather he's using it in terms of all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge being stored up in Christ in English in millions of millions hidden away I wish that was me by the way but it's not a person who's got millions of pounds hidden away and what we mean by that isn't that there are millions of pounds hidden around their house in hidden places but simply they've got the money stored somewhere we might want to use a slang word and say as Delba would have said he's got it stashed somewhere that's the best way to understand what the apostle Paul is saying here in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are stashed what Paul is emphatically not saying is that the truth about Jesus is a secret no need to a few because that goes against everything the

Bible says and everything Jesus came to teach and say and do and Paul's argument in Colossians Jesus died on a hill in full view of a watching world in order that whoever puts their faith and trust in him will have eternal life Jesus Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are stashed both his person and work is the meaning of life the purpose of existence and he calls the

church to broadcast it all over the world it's not a secret go tell every man and woman every boy and girl I've got good news for you Jesus is the Christ and in him you'll find your 42 Jesus is for you he's the purpose of our existence as human beings and knowing him as the meaning of your life that meaning that you were created by

God to search after and find in him and Jesus Christ the living Jesus Christ invites you today to come to him through his word he says to us if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God had raised him from the dead you will be saved he invites us to find our meaning in him because the good news is it won't cost you anything to find it in him he has already paid the price as we close let me tell you what another great Christian of long ago said said it to the kids already his name was Augustine he was from present day Tunisia having been brought up a pagan having lived a very immoral life Augustine became a Christian through reading the Bible in Milan later in life he wrote a famous book called the confessions in which he wrote these wonderful words

Lord thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee Lord you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you is that you today you of the restless heart not knowing what your purpose in life is thinking that somehow the microwaves are telly wondering why you can't watch much of the day on it is that you lying under the stars on a starry night on a beach wondering what the purpose of your existence is and becoming depressed is that you the person who's been searching for the truth for so many long years but only becoming more frustrated as time goes on is that you listen again to Augustine Lord our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you the Lord in whom we're called to find rest is Jesus Christ and in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge they're stashed in him 42 isn't the answer to anything Jesus Christ is let us pray Lord we thank you for your word but more than anything else we thank you for the Jesus of whom your word speaks and yes it would be arrogance and naivety where the things of which we have spoken today untrue but because they are true it's not arrogance it's just being straightforward to say that you've made us for yourselves every human being and our hearts will never be at rest they'll never really be satisfied until we find our rest in you

[29 : 37] Lord for the undecided among us today we ask that you would grant us certainty that following Jesus is the most relevant and contemporary and pressingly urgent thing we can ever do we ask these things in Jesus name Amen