

Vision Series 2023

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Preacher: John French

[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. For those of you who don't know me, my name is John French, and I'm on the team here. And we're looking at Jesus is all about meaning today.

I remember when I was in year six, I remember thinking, when I get to high school, I think I'll have made it. And after about three weeks, I started looking around and I thought, the seniors.

When I get to be a senior, a prefect, then I'll have made it. And I became a senior, and yes, I was a prefect, and it was good for about three weeks.

And I started thinking, well, university. When I get to university, then I'll have made it. So eventually got to university, I moved out of home and went down to Wollongong.

It was good for about three weeks. So then I thought, maybe if I get a girlfriend. I get a girlfriend and eventually got a girlfriend and about three weeks, you know.

[1:02] We're always looking for the next thing, never satisfied. There's an ache, a hunger inside us, but for what? Have you noticed how each new day we strive, think, and worry about the future, looking desperately to fill our lives with anything that will give us meaning and relevance, significance, purpose, and hope?

I want my life to count. I want to live a life of purpose. I want life to have meaning. Bernard Levin, a British journalist, once wrote, Why do I have to know why I was born?

Because, of course, I'm unable to believe that it was an accident. And if it wasn't one, I must have a meaning. Yet the American philosopher Thomas Nagel writes in his essay, The Absurd, Even if you produce a great work of literature, which continues to be read thousands of years from now, eventually the solar system will cool or the universe will wind down and collapse and all trace of your effort will vanish.

The problem is that although there are justifications for most things big and small that we do within life, none of these explanations explain the point of your life as a whole.

It wouldn't matter if you'd never existed. And after you have gone out of existence, it won't matter that you did exist. It's pretty bleak.

[2:38] He concludes that in order to answer the question, What is the point of life? We must attach things we do to something larger than ourselves. So what on earth am I here for?

What is the purpose of my life? Why did God make me if there is a God? And what am I supposed to be doing with my life? Now this is not a new question.

Thousands of years ago, the teacher asked the same question. In Ecclesiastes 7 verse 24 is, How can anyone discover the meaning of life? If all we are, our evolved cosmic specks of dust in the universe, our past had no purpose, our future contains no hope, the inevitability of death means our present possesses nothing of real meaning or value.

This isn't in the notes, but a quick side note. I've only got one memory of my great-grandfather, and it's not one that I have personally, it's one that's been planted in my head, because it's a story.

And he was a cobbler, and he was a chain smoker, and he would finish one cigarette and start the next, and then he'd finish a pack of cigarettes, and he'd cut out the label of the pack, and he would tack it to his wall.

[4:00] So his little cobbler shop was wallpapered with the covers of his cigarette packet. I don't even know his name off the top of my head, I have to look it up. And that was my great-grandfather. Meaningless.

Meaningless. Or is it? None of us want to merely exist, for life to just be average. By nature, we want our lives to be full and purposeful, and so we make a bucket list, put ourselves at the centre, and make it up as we go along.

Sure, we can exist, and we can keep busy getting through school, gaining qualifications, working at a job, raising a family, paying bills, living for the weekends, meeting deadlines and commitments, solving problems, prioritising.

We're busy. And though we really want more fulfilment from each day, the purpose of life can elude us. And it's amazing that people can go through life not discovering the purpose they were made for, and then they leave this life not knowing the answer to the question, why do I exist?

The atheist Bertrand Russell recognised this. Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless. The good news is, we can know our purpose, because we can know a personal God, who has revealed himself to us, in the person of Jesus, and Jesus said, I've come that they may have life, and life to the full.

[5:35] Before I get to our purpose, I want to outline the negative effects of not taking the time to understand the purpose of life. If we fail to find the meaning and purpose of life, we face three consequences.

Without knowing our purpose, life will seem tiresome. Without purpose, we're like a hamster on a treadmill, spinning day after day, doing the same thing, over and over.

And at the end of the day, you drop into bed, and wonder, why am I doing this? It's almost like the myth of Sisyphus, who Zeus curses him for eternity, to push a boulder up the hill.

As soon as he gets almost to the top, it rolls back down again, and he has to start again. What is the purpose of life, if this is all there is? Is there more to life, than what I'm doing?

The author of Ecclesiastes, wisdom literature, found in the scriptures the same question, that life seems tiresome. Meaningless, meaningless.

[6:38] Everything is meaningless, they concluded. Without knowing our purpose, life will seem unfulfilling. When we don't know our purpose, we're restless, always on the move, moving to the next thing, wondering, is this going to bring satisfaction?

We're never going to be at peace, until we know our purpose. And without knowing our purpose, life will seem uncontrollable. While we're trying to control our lives, there are so many things out of control.

Have you ever tried to solve a problem, like changing somebody, or your circumstances, that just refuse to change? The truth is, life, like so many things, seem unfixable.

So if you don't find the purpose for life, life will seem tiresome, it will seem unfulfilling, and uncontrollable. So what do we do, if we don't know our purpose?

We've only got two options. Option number one, we make it up. People do this all the time. We create meaning for our lives.

[7:52] And we do this through a hobby, or a sport, or music, or achievements, or career, or something else, trying to make meaning. So we make it up.

Create meaning for ourselves. Now all these activities can be fun and worthwhile, and they can have value to them, but inside we know there's got to be more to life than just having a job, or having a hobby, or having a sport.

Something is missing. What on earth am I here for? We could put it in the too hard basket, try not to think about it, and just fill our lives with distractions.

Because death awaits, so let's try to create some kind of meaning. We will never discover the meaning and purpose of our life by looking within ourselves. It's the wrong place to start.

We didn't create ourselves, so there's no way we can tell ourselves what we were created for. The purpose of our life is far greater than our personal fulfillment, our peace of mind, or even our happiness.

[8:58] It's far greater than our family, school, hobbies, even our wildest dreams and ambitions. If we want to know why we're placed on this planet, we must begin with our maker.

Thank goodness there is a second option to knowing our purpose in life. This second option is to discover what God says is the purpose of life.

God's the creator of life, so God knows. And this is relevant for us now. This is so plausible, and this is good. We were born by God's good purpose and for God's purpose.

Contrast that with what the world says. It's all about you. It's all about me. It actually all starts with God. We're not here by chance.

All of this, this is not meaningless. We're born with a purpose. And the answer is found in the scriptures, and we stood a moment ago and said this. For everything, absolutely everything, above

and below, visible and invisible, everything got started in Jesus and finds its purpose in Jesus.
[10:14] Everything in creation has a primary purpose or a reason for existing. That's every tree, every rock, every creature, every human. For anyone or anything to be successful, it must fulfill that purpose.

Every individual that God has created has a primary purpose. In the passage read to us a moment ago, Paul shows us three simple things to consider when living purposefully, and at the end, I'm going to summarize five clear purposes God has for us that come out of this.
Number one, know your purpose. In other words, what is our reason for living? What on earth am I here for? And when we consider God's purpose for our life and what gives life meaning, we need to grasp that it's all about relationships and it's all prefaced by love.
Love for God and love for one another. So outlining the scriptures, God has five purposes for us, and as we undertake them, we attach ourselves to the very thing, the thing, that is larger than ourselves.

So our number one purpose. We have planned for God's good pleasure to worship God. Magnification. We're not a mistake.

[11:33] God intentionally made us. God loves us and he delights in us. As a parent loves their child. God loves us and he delights in us. In Revelation 4.11, we read, you are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.

For you created all things, and by your will, they were created and have their being. In 1647, the Westminster Confession asked, what is the chief end of humankind?
And the answer, a human's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Now, don't think this is as if God is on some ego trip or is really insecure or needs our praise because he's very content as a trying God.

We give glory and praise all the time. We give glory to creators of new inventions or a standing ovation at a fantastic concert. Thursday night, I went to Sting and we all stood up and cheered and there was a big encore and it was awesome.

We recognize talent, athletes, medals, Grammys, Logies, awards. We recognize achievement discoveries and we celebrate that. God has given us an amazing planet and the gift of life.

[12:57] And each new day, a sunrise, an air to breathe, and a plethora of diversity of things to see and enjoy. We have so much to be thankful to God for, to honor and give God glory.

We give praise where it's due so we magnify and glorify the name of God and Jesus. In this passage read to us a moment ago from Philippians 3, Paul wrote quite simply, our second purpose for living is to be like Jesus.

Philippians 3 verse 10, I want to know Christ. I want to be like him. I want to love him. I want to love like him and live like him. Becoming like Christ, spiritual growth, discipleship, in other words, maturity in Jesus and in our faith is one of God's purposes for our life.

To be like Jesus. What a different world. Lord, how good would it be if everyone was just like Jesus?

Paul reminds us in this passage how holding on to the past can hinder us from purposeful living. So in verse 13, the second part, he says, I forget what is behind and I press on.

[14:13] So to live a life of purpose, we can't hold on to the past. There are some things that can hinder us from purposeful living and one of those is holding on to the past. Don't hold on to the bad.

Paul, like all of us, had a past that he needed to forget. He'd caused a lot of pain and hurt a lot of people. And now he was faced with a choice. He could either dwell on his mistakes and let them ruin his life or he could forget about them and move on.

We face this choice. Maybe you've had a bad experience just lately or maybe you did something long ago that you really regret. Maybe the memories keep coming back to haunt you or someone keeps reminding you of them and that's stopping you from living purposefully.

This can hinder us in our mature growth. Guess what? We all have a past. We've got to forget the past. I'm not talking about fond memories.

Hang on to them. But past mistakes. They're in the past. They're done and gone. There's nothing we can do to change that. Hopefully we can learn from them and not keep making the same mistakes.

[15:27] But what we need to do is forget what is behind and press on. Don't live in the past. Regardless of the past, we still have the rest of life to play out.

As God's grace and it's just irresistible overflows and he's willing to forget our mistakes. He expects us to do the same and we're reminded in Isaiah chapter 43.

I will remember your sins no more. Second element of the past that we must let go of is actually surprisingly don't hold on to the good. That may seem counterintuitive but let me explain.

We can zero in on a good period of time in our life and spend the rest of our lives trying to relive that moment or recreate it. There's a famous play by Ray Lawler, the Australian playwright, Summer of the 17th Soul.

These guys keep their cane pickers and they keep going back to Melbourne. I think it is and my agency memory serves me well. And they try to relive those glory days when they were younger and it just doesn't unfold that way.

[16 : 37] Have you ever heard someone say life was better in the good old days? Paul knew that a good past was not enough to guarantee a meaningful future and concluded whatever gain I counted as loss for the sake of Jesus.

Paul was saying I'm not going to live in the past. My purpose for living is for God's glory and to be like Jesus. And whatever happened yesterday good or bad is now ancient history.

I want to live for Jesus today. So know this God loves us just the way we are but he loves us too much to leave us that way.

He wants to transform us to be like Jesus. The third thing in this Bible passage to focus on in purposeful living is to verse 13 press on toward the goal to win the prize.

Don't lose sight of the fact that this isn't all there is to life. The resurrection makes it clear that eternity awaits.

[17 : 43] We come back which means our past has purpose our future is full of hope and our present is extremely significant meaningful and of value.

Everything we do counts. Everything we do is relevant. and everything we do if we're being like Jesus in the world is good for this world.

So in the noise that Jesus is our future and our future is secure we don't have to worry about tomorrow so we can press on today. It's easy to live in the past.

It's easy to dream away the future. It's a real challenge to face the present because it means we can no longer allow ourselves the luxury of saying if only or one of these days I'll do this or that.

Press on. Facing the present means that we choose to live life as it comes to us day by day as we put our faith in Jesus today and trust him to be involved in every part of our lives.

[18 : 48] There are incredible benefits of knowing our purpose and then living for that purpose. Knowing our purpose gives us focus. It actually simplifies life. It motivates us and the key here is that it's preparation for eternity.

In preparation for eternity we need to know those five purposes and so I'm going to summarize them. I've covered a couple but I'm going to just add a couple more in. Number one we were formed for God's good pleasure to worship God give God the glory and magnify his name.

I said number two is maturity but I'm going to use two now as membership. We were formed to be part of God's family and fellowship together. Membership as the body of Christ. God calls us his children.

We are brand new creation in Christ. Let's build one another up and carry each other's burdens. There's an old song which I just love the lyrics to. It's called the servant song. Brother, sister, let me serve you.

Let me be like Christ to you and pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant to. We are pilgrims on a journey. When I weep, I will weep with you.

[20 : 01] When I laugh, I'll laugh with you. We will share our joys and sorrows till we see this journey through. Ephesians 2.10 reminds us we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

So I mentioned maturity before but I'll mention it again. We're created to be disciples, to be like Christ. From the inside out, God seeks to change us to be like Jesus.

What a difference to know Christ. We're shaped for serving God in ministry, seeking justice, showing compassion, loving God and loving others.

That's right here, right now. And again, this isn't in the notes. I'm going to tangent just slightly, but it's not. I was speaking with Uncle Max and Uncle Max was the president of MAF International.

That's my wife's uncle. And he was saying a great disservice was shown to him all those years ago. He's in his 80s now. When he first started ministry, people would say, oh, God's called you into full-time ministry.

[21:10] And he said that was a great disservice because then it was like a get-out-of-jail free card for them. I'm not called into full-time service. You are. And that's just not true.

It's because someone's paid in full-time ministry, but you're in full-time ministry too. We all are. Whatever vocation you're in, we're all in ministry together. We're reminded in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are one body and many parts.

Wherever you are in life, whatever skill set, whatever role you have, consider yourself in full-time ministry. God has called you there to serve. And we're part of the mission.

That's the fifth purpose, to go and make disciples of many nations. Point people to Jesus. In your speech, in your actions, in the way you do your books as an accountant, whatever it is, point people to Jesus.

We're all part of God's good purpose. I want us to imagine for a moment there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400.

[22:14] Just picture that. You just got \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. So at the evening at 11.59pm, it deletes whatever balance you haven't used during the day.

What would you do with that \$86,400 that day? You'd draw it all out surely and you'd use it. Well, each of us has such a bank and it's called time.

Every morning it credits us with 86,400 seconds. Every night we lose whatever this we have failed to invest in God's good purpose.

We can never get back any of it. It's lost forever. Each day time opens up a new account for us and each night it burns the remains of the day. If we fail to use the day's deposit, the loss is ours.

What are you doing with your life? What on earth am I here for? Now I know this illustration has some holes. We do need to sleep or else we'll actually die. So if you get eight hours sleep a night, that's 28,800 seconds.

[23:31] But it still leaves us with 57,600 seconds left to live each day for Christ. Life is short. We need to take advantage of every opportunity that comes our way to fulfill our meaning and live purposefully.

God has a purpose for everything and everyone. If your heart is beating right now, God wants us to live out that purpose he has planned for you. Don't wait for some transcendent experience or voice from God booming from heaven.

Get on with it. We're called right now to magnification, to membership, to maturity, to ministry and mission. Will you live a life of purpose?

It begins when we say, I forget what is past, I press on, I seek to know Christ and to make him known.

Amen. Amen.