

Sermon: Saved from Something for Something

Series: Finding Grace at the Intersections

Scripture: Colossians 1:21-23 and Ephesians 2:1-10

Date Used: October 16, 2022

Focus: God has saved us from death that we might accomplish God's purpose for our lives.

According to the findings of a survey conducted by Lifeway Research that were shared in April 2021, Americans are more likely to regularly think about how they can find more meaning and purpose in their lives than they were a decade ago. According to the study, 81% of Americans believe there is an ultimate plan and purpose for every person's life.

Two out of three Americans, 68%, say a major priority in their life is finding a higher purpose. An even greater number, 73%, say it is important that they pursue a higher purpose that brings meaning to their lives.

The study reveals that discovering one's purpose seems to be a longing in most people's lives. We want to know not only **who** God designed us to be, but **what** it is that God designed us to do.

In the Book of Genesis, we read about the first human beings God created: Adam and Eve. We learn about who they were and what it was that God designed them to do.

As we read the story of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis, we discover that they were created to have a loving and caring relationship with one another. As we continue to read, we discover that they were not only created to have a loving relationship with one another, but to have a loving relationship with God as well. God designed them to live in harmony with God and with each other.

As we read their story in the pages of Genesis, we discover that their purpose, what they were created to do, was to care for one another and to care for God's creation.

But we all know how the story of Adam and Eve goes, the ideal did not become the real. They failed to become who God designed them to be. They failed to do what God designed for them to do. And every generation that has followed Adam and Eve has failed in this same way.... That includes us.

But, even amidst our failure, God puts a desire in our hearts for God and a desire to live into God's purpose for our lives. We have this innate desire to be and to do what God created us to be and to do.

French philosopher, mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal wrote: "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every human which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus."

There is this God shaped empty space in each of us, that can only be filled by something of substance. And that something of substance that can fill our hearts is God.

I think Pascal was right on target. Within us, there is this innate desire for God. Several centuries before Pascal, Saint Augustine wrote of God in his book *Confessions*, “(God), You have made us and directed us toward yourself, and our heart is restless until we rest in you.”

Augustine is saying that God has created a place in our hearts for God, and we will always feel a sense of incompleteness and emptiness until God can take God’s rightful place within our lives. Augustine is saying, there is no accomplishment, achievement, fortune, or fame that can fill this void. God created a space within us that only God can fill.

According to our Wesleyan theology, when we accept God’s freely offered gift of salvation, when we enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ, that vacuum begins to be filled.

The story is told of a salesman who was one of the top salespeople in his company. He won trips and national awards for his accomplishments. But the man felt empty. The awards the accolades meant nothing to him. He had this God shaped vacuum in his heart he could not fill.

Deep within his being he felt this yearning for something more. He struggled to put his finger on just what it was he yearned for. He could never identify what it was he needed in his life.

A friend of his invited him to a Friday evening event at his church. The guy thought, “It’s probably just some motivational speaker that I really don’t want to hear.” But he did not want to disappoint his friend, so he went.

The speaker was the CEO of a corporation and he spoke about all of the success he had had in business, all of his accomplishments, and all of the accolades he had received. What he said next really resonated with at least one person in the audience that evening. “But all of it meant nothing to me. I still felt empty. I felt there was something vital still missing from my life.”

This salesman was sitting there and going, “He’s talking about me!”

The speaker then shared that this emptiness in his life only began to be filled when he invited Jesus to come into his life. Only then did that void in his life begin to be filled.

When an invitation was given, the salesman went forward. He asked, “What do I have to do?” The person who met him at the altar rail said, “Begin by accepting what God has already done for you; begin by knowing God loves and accepts you as you are. Then invite Jesus to come into your life. Ask him to fill that void in your heart.”

That's what grace does. Christ enters into our lives, apart from any personal works we could ever boast about. What we receive from God is what we can receive from God, and God alone. We receive God, the only being that can fill that vacuum. God, and God alone, can fulfill that longing for God that Pascal and Augustine speak of. God, through the power of God's grace, through God's initiative, through the gift of Jesus Christ, enters into us and fills that God shaped vacuum.

But there is another vacuum in each of our lives that is just as real. In the text from Ephesians 2 we heard not only how God fills the heart's desire to know who we are, but God also desires to let us know what we are to do. In the 10th verse of Ephesians 2 we find these words, "For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."

Paul is saying, we have been given this gift of life because God has something for us to do. God has given us the gift of life because God has some way that God wants our lives to become part of God's bigger story. God has a "what" planned for our lives, a purpose, to go along with the "who" God has created us to be.

Hopefully we all know that our lives matter. Our lives count. We can and we do make a difference in the world. God has a plan for each one of our lives and has a plan for how our lives can make a difference in the world. And God's plan for our lives takes into account our life experiences, our knowledge, our skills and our talents. God puts this all together to design a purpose for our being. God has things God wants us to accomplish.

And God gives us a passion to do the very thing that God has designed for us to accomplish. It's a purpose-shaped vacuum drawing us toward living into God's plan for our lives.

When these two vacuums are filled in our lives – the God shaped vacuum to know God and to know who we are, and the purpose shaped vacuum, to know what we were created for – when these vacuums are filled we come to understand what we have been saved for. God has saved us to accomplish God's purpose for our lives.

As the words found in the second chapter of Ephesians emphasize, salvation by grace through faith is God's gift to us. But the good that God prepared for us to do is our gift back to God and to the world.

God has created us to partner with God in the work God does.

God has given us both a longing for God and a need for purpose in our lives. God fulfills the needs in our lives to know who we were created to be and our need to know what we were created to do by coming into our hearts, by helping us to grow in grace, that we might share God's grace with the world as we live out our God given purpose.

And to make sure we live out that purpose, God has placed a burning desire within us to live out our life's purpose. God has taken our life experiences, the talents and spiritual gifts God has placed within us, the knowledge and skill we have acquired, and put them together in our lives to give us a passion for something.

There is a fellow named Clay in Colorado who loves chain saws. You might say that Clay's passion is chain saws. While there are people who have been given the hands with long fingers to play the piano, Clay's hands look like they were created to hold a chain saw.

Clay is a contractor and as part of his work, he uses chain saws. To hold a humming, air-injected, non-vibrating, Model 340 Husqvarna chain saw to him is a dream come true.

So, when the call went out for people that were able to run chain saws to cut up fallen trees following Hurricane Katrina, Clay's palms began to sweat. When Clay heard the words, "And if the chain saw breaks, we'll have another one for you. We have chain saws; we just need people to run them" it was like music to his ears. The thought of being on the working end of a chain saw for 18 hours absolutely invigorated him.

John Eldridge the founder of Ransomed Heart Ministries once said, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come fully alive." Well, Clay is fully alive and feels God's pleasure when he is running a chain saw.

Look at your life story. It was not thrown together without a plan. We have been given this gift of life as a gift on loan from God. When we live our lives from the perspective that they are on loan from God we begin to realize that our money and our things are all on loan, that our time and talents are on loan, our life experiences are on loan – all to be used to further God's purpose in the world. When we realize this, we begin to live with purpose.

What will your contribution to the world be?
What were you saved for?
Go do it!