

“YOU WERE MADE FOR A MISSION (PDL6)”

Philippians 1:12-26

As you are probably aware, this is the last of this short series of sermons based on Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life*. We’ve been reflecting on what life is all about, why we’re here, what our purpose is. We’ve seen, I hope, that we are called, as followers of Jesus Christ, to a life that is characterised by worship, fellowship, service to one another and submission to God. In this week’s readings, you’ll see that mission is also a key part of the purpose that God has for each of us.

Now, the things that Rick Warren has written have stirred us up to discussion and debate, and it’s good to know that we’ve been thinking hard about this subject, even if we haven’t always agreed with the book or with each other. But one of the things that I always find a bit worrying about such exercises – and I know I’m not the only one – is that we read all this stuff, and we discuss it and pray about it, and then what happens? There have been all kinds of things for us to do as a result of reading the book. And don’t get me wrong, it’s been a worthwhile experience: but you can come away from such series with a great sense of inadequacy (and not only that you haven’t managed to turn any of your sermons into multi-million dollar franchises!). Each chapter has given us lists of things to do – seven steps to this and five exercises for that and so on. Isn’t there a temptation to begin worrying that we haven’t done everything required, we’ve missed out a step, we haven’t achieved as we should have done, we’ve missed our target and therefore our purpose?

I’m hoping that you will read the final chapters in this book and that they will have a positive effect on your desire to share the good news of Jesus, but I just want us to look a bit beyond that today. We do have a purpose, a reason for our lives and it is as Paul writes here in *Philippians 1:21*, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” Everything we do here is done in grateful submission to Jesus, as we have seen in past weeks, but there’s something even better to look forward to in the future. Whatever else Christians might be – worshipping, witnessing, sociable, serving – the one thing that I always think should characterise the people of God is **joy**. And this letter of Paul to the Philippian Christians is written to ram that point home.

If I were to ask you what single thing prevented you being joyful, I’m sure you’d all have different things to mention. But if we looked at those things carefully and tried to work out exactly why they drained you of the joy you feel you ought to have, they would almost certainly all boil down to the same thing – anxiety. We are creatures who worry, aren’t we? And as Christians, with so many expectations laid upon you by the likes of me and Mr Warren, you may find that you’re even more prone to it.

Some people are born to it – it’s in the lines of their face: they were created with a frown and an astonishing variety of little nervous twitches and a whole thesaurus full of anxious phrases. Some people learn it – from their families, from their friends, from media that depend on scare-mongering to boost circulation and increase viewing figures, from other anxious Christians who think you can’t really be saved if you haven’t been delivered from the bondage of humour. Some people have it thrust upon them, through situations which seem beyond their control and really, when you get down to it, don’t concern them anyway. And it can sometimes be that having read a book or listened to sermons which on the face of it seem to make the whole Christian experience just a matter of following the prescribed route, ticking off the right boxes, we still can’t quite achieve the level of soul-winning and wonder-working that we feel we should.

And then our present experience gets messed up because we’re so worried about what the future holds. Will I be able to keep it up? What’s going to happen if I slip back? What will the other people in my group think of me? What will God think of me? Just remember: you are one of God’s people. You have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. He loves you. You have a great future in heaven already guaranteed for you. You see, our anxieties are almost exclusively about the future, about things that haven’t happened yet and might never happen. However much we worry, we cannot change the future simply by worrying

about it. Pete, a strong and conscientious Christian, used to lay awake at night worrying about all that was going on in his life and the lives of others. Would he be able to be a good witness? Would he be able to answer his friends' questions? Would he fall victim to temptation? God spoke to him and said, "You go to sleep, Pete. I'll sit up and sort it out."

And the great thing is, he has. We are given the awesome privilege of participating in the mission of God to the world. As we saw last time, it's wonderful to be involved and we all have an important part to play. But it doesn't depend on us. We are actually joining God in his mission, which is already going on – and has been for centuries. It's his work and we are invited to take part. We don't need to worry about it. Yes, we need to take it seriously. But if our experience of the Christian life is reduced to a checklist of worthy alliterative actions, then we can easily end up losing that joy which was so much a part of Paul's experience and which he commends to the Philippians here.

And, as I said, the key to it is actually looking beyond the here and now. Yes, we do have a purpose here. Yes, there are things which God wants us to do which give us a sense of purpose, a reason for living, but they all point forward to the time when we shall be able to enjoy God's company for ever. Do you remember how, as a child, you'd look forward to holidays, to special treats, to all the good things that were going to happen? Having those happy times in view helped to cope with the things that had to be done in the mean time, which were probably hard work and could be a struggle. "*One more day of school, one more day of sorrow, one more day on the old school bench and we'll be home tomorrow,*" we used to sing. And even now my life is lived with various staging posts of good things stretching away to the horizon. So why, as followers of Christ, do we not look forward to and rejoice in the amazing prospect that awaits us in heaven? If anticipating a fortnight in Cleethorpes or a trip to the cinema next week can keep the worries at bay for a few days, why shouldn't the thought of heaven be equally appealing? (Mind you, if heaven's just Cleethorpes for eternity, I may have to rethink some of my theology!)

If you look back through the history of the church, you'll find the most joyful people are those who have kept that sense of balance that is mentioned in Rick Warren's book, and have included in that balance a view of the future. The Early Church kept themselves going by expecting the return of Jesus pretty soon. The Puritans, whom we often view as being dour and serious people, were actually a very jolly bunch and their writings are full of the anticipation of the reality of heaven and the prospect of God's work in them in the near future. The Victorians had heaven in perspective and a hymn book like *Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos* (much beloved of many of you) has a huge section on heaven and the joyful future that awaits God's people. Black gospel music is totally suffused with rejoicing at the thought of going to heaven – in stark contrast with the misery of life here and now. But many of our songs and hymns today are so preoccupied with the here and now, with our own selves and our own experiences, that we are in danger of losing that eternal dimension to our worship.

So what's Paul got to say that might encourage us as we try to live lives that are full of purpose and that can point other people towards Jesus? He doesn't simply write "Don't be anxious" and leave it at that. In this letter to the Philippians, we read of his **Eager Expectation**, his **Eternal Encounter** and his **Enthusiastic Example**.

1. EAGER EXPECTATION

In *1:20*, Paul shows that he looks to the future in the short and the long term with a sense of eagerness – "*I eagerly expect and hope ...*" Here is a man who is always looking forward and watching out for the good things that are going to happen. He can't wait to get on with the task that has been given him and he is bursting to continue with the job. I hope we are really enthusiastic about putting into practice some of the things we've been reading and talking about during Lent.

Paul's a great one for making up new words when he can't find one that really encapsulates what he wants to say. Here he has used a word (translated "*eagerly expect*") which only appears one other time in all of Greek literature (and that's in *Romans 8:19*) and which conveys the idea of stretching forward as with an outstretched hand. It has at its root a concentrated hope which ignores all other interests. Perhaps the best way to think of it is to think of Linford Christie, the sprinter. All his being is concentrated on the finishing line. As he waits for the gun to go off, he focuses on the finishing line. He starts his races with the knowledge that he is going to win. He leaves the blocks on the "*B of the bang*" and throughout the race his neck is stretched out to be the first over the line. He is eager for the result.

But Linford Christie's attitude is confined to the minutes around the race. William Morrice, writing about the words for joy that Paul uses in this letter, says that "*The future tense of joy indicates that the Apostle's mood is no passing emotion but that it is one that will outlast all the present troubles.*" We could try and criticise Paul as being out of touch with reality – "What does he know about my situation? It's all very well him and Rick Warren and others going on about being joyful and looking to the future, but what does he know about it all?" Well, listen to these words which Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians – they aren't the words of a man living in an ivory tower, out of touch with the reality of suffering, trouble and very hard work (*2 Corinthians 11:23ff*). Paul was so full of eager expectation that, although experience told him that there was another beating just around the corner, although every time he stepped out of doors (when he wasn't chained to a guard) he could expect to be set upon by Jews, Romans, intellectuals, souvenir sellers or whatever, there was still an awful lot of good stuff to look forward to.

Are you able to have that same sense of eager expectation? Can you look beyond the merely here and now, beyond the worries about whether you ought to be involved in short-term mission, about whether you are doing enough to contribute to the life of the church, about whether you are making the fullest possible use of every single gift you've got? Do you ever stop and thank God that heaven is waiting for you – and you have a free pass to get inside, courtesy of Jesus Christ?

2. ETERNAL ENCOUNTER

There's no doubt at all that Paul lived for his faith and for his mission. He knew what his purpose was and he writes on more than one occasion that his only thoughts are for Christ, that his only subject for preaching is the cross. Yet the prospect of heaven is even more appealing, because there the encounter will go on for all eternity. In the verse we've already quoted, he says, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" Some of you probably think a bit like that from time to time, when things are getting on top of you – "I just wish I could end it all." But that is a negative attitude: it's not the prospect of meeting Christ that attracts you, it's the thought of escape from what's going on here. It's not a note of joy that is sounded, as Paul manages to do here, but a resignation to the idea that anything must be better than this.

In the following verse, Paul admits his dilemma – he knows he has things to do here and he is quite happy to do them – he knows what his purpose is – but as he says in *1:23*, "*I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far.*" He wants to go to heaven – indeed, he's on his way there even now. We're all on our way to heaven and the prospect of that eternal encounter with Christ is as real for one as it is for the other. What brings us the difficulty is the journey we have to make to get there. There are all kinds of different things that happen to us on the way to heaven, but the destination is the same.

Some years ago I went to Greece with *Oak Hall* – overland! The journey was awful: it rained all the way; we camped three nights in the pouring rain on the way there; there was a problem with the coach – everything that could go wrong went wrong. I don't think any of us had been there before, so we were all wondering if it was going to be like this for the fortnight we'd actually be in Greece. The driver and leader *had* been there before – he knew what it was going to be like; he knew what the journey would be like, so while the rest of us struggled in the cold and the wet, wearing our shorts and sandals and privately cursing the benighted countries through which we were passing, he strode about in his waterproofs and

wellies, singing chorused and whistling to the point where, had I not been the speaker, I would have taken him behind a tree and expressed my frustration in a series of fairly short words and accompanying actions! But when we arrived in Greece, it was superb: everything was just wonderful. Dave knew what to expect, so he led us with a certain amount of joy.

The Bible tells us what to expect – an eternal encounter with Jesus (you know, the one we're always saying we love in our songs). It'll be brilliant, and whatever we have to put up with on this earth, those things will pass away and we will be with Christ. Albert Schweitzer, the great medical missionary, musician and theologian, wrote in his memoirs:

'One day, in my despair, I threw myself into a chair in the consulting room and groaned out, "What a blockhead I was to come out here to doctor savages like these!" Whereupon Joseph [his servant] quietly remarked, "Yes, doctor, here on earth you are a great blockhead, but not in heaven".'

3. ENTHUSIASTIC EXAMPLE

Paul never preached or wrote anything that he didn't do himself and his letters are full of calls to his readers to follow his example. In *3:12*, he tells them what he is trying to do, recognising his own continuing imperfections. And he isn't setting the example in a half-hearted way: he is not a reluctant Christian. The passage we read from *2 Corinthians 11* a few moments ago will reinforce that.

Paul knows his priorities and they are not his health, his wealth, his career, his car, his soft furnishings. Jesus is at the heart of all that he is doing and Jesus is the goal of all that he preaches and teaches. He loves it, and he loves it because he knows that Jesus loves him (even if he hasn't remembered all five things that shape his mission in the right order) and he is going to be with him for ever. At the top of his list of priorities are the truths about Jesus and the thrill of proclaiming them. Much of our lack of joy stems from anxiety brought on by having the wrong priorities, worrying unnecessarily about the wrong things, losing our sense of balance and proportion.

What are your priorities? What are you worrying about? Are you more worried now about ensuring that you follow the correct steps towards discovering your purpose than you are about Jesus loving you? Jesus knows the problems you have and prayer is a great way of helping to unload those anxieties on to the shoulders of the only person who can really deal with them. I don't want to say this morning that you don't need to sort out your purpose in life, that you needn't take seriously the things we've been talking about for the last five or six weeks. I don't want to say that we put up with our lot down here, whatever it may be, simply because we're going to heaven – a pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die theology. But a proper perspective on heaven can make a huge difference. Eagerly expect the eternal encounter with Jesus and follow the enthusiastic example which Paul sets. Think a bit more about heaven and what you've got to look forward to, and it will make a great deal of difference to your attitudes here and now and to the way in which you pursue your God-given purpose in life. Rejoice in the future! It's a great one – and it affects the present too. As one writer once put it (P Ainsworth), *'People sometimes say to youth, "The world is at your feet". But this is not true unless heaven is in your heart.'*

Let me close with some words from the great Puritan divine, Richard Baxter. These are from his lengthy book *Dying Thoughts* (which lead me to believe he must have had a very protracted death!).

"But in heaven I shall have none of these obstructions. All old unkindness and ingratitude will be forgiven: the great reconciler in whom I am beloved, will then have perfected his work. I shall then be wholly separated from the vanity which here deceived me: my open soul will be prepared to receive the heavenly influx: with open face I shall behold the open face of glorifying love. I shall joyfully attend his voice, and delightfully relish the celestial provisions! No disease will corrupt my appetite: no sluggishness will make me guilty again of my old neglects. The love of the Father, by the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, will have got the victory over all my deadness, folly and disaffection, and my God-displeasing and self-undoing averseness and enmity will be gone for ever. The perfect love which God doth first effect in me, will be my everlasting spring of the fullest love of God."

Benevolent love will make me good, that is, a holy lover of God; and then pleased love will make me his delight, and benevolence will still maintain me in my capacity. Study this heavenly work of love, O my soul, these are not dead or barren studies: these are not sad or unpleasant studies.”

"THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE"

6. You were made for a mission

Read – *Philippians 1:12-26*

All Christians are called not only to a life of worship, fellowship and service, but also to a life of witness. This takes place through our actions and our words – the words may be necessary to explain the way we live our lives (*2 Peter 3:15*) – and it can take place in our own community or in some other part of the world.

Many Christians, however, find evangelism scary or difficult. Indeed, we can sometimes feel that we are a failure as a Christian if we are not constantly telling others about the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is important, as this series draws to a close, that we don't feel burdened by a perceived need to follow all the different strategies that have been outlined in the book. We do all have a purpose and we must take that very seriously, but beyond that we have a great hope of heaven and the prospect of eternity spent with a God of grace and love. Our determination to discover our purpose and work towards its fulfilment should not deprive us of our **JOY**.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul stresses the joyful nature of the Christian life and locates the source of that joy in the hope of heaven. He writes of his own ...

Eager Expectation – We need to look beyond the here and now to the "finish line" and allow that to influence our discipleship in the present.

Eternal Encounter – Paul had a positive desire to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven rather than a negative attitude to the present task of living out the gospel truth.

Enthusiastic Example – Despite his own shortcomings (of which he was acutely aware) Paul was still able to exhort others to follow his example of joyful service.

In the end, we once again need to examine our priorities and ensure that our anxieties are given over to God, who in his grace can equip us and encourage in discovering and following the purpose for our lives.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS IN YOUR HOUSEGROUP

1. What are the typical fears and stereotypes that people have when they hear the word "*evangelism*"? What keeps **you** from sharing the Good News with others?
2. What do you feel might be a part of the Life Message that God has given you to share with the world?
3. Share the name of a not-yet-believing friend for whom everyone in your group can begin praying.
4. How has reading through this book together helped to refocus or redirect your life purpose? What have been some of the most helpful insights to you?
5. Who does God bring to mind that you could share the life-changing message of this book with?
6. What are we going to do next?

Day Thirty-six

I was made for a mission.

Remember: *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

(Matthew 28:19-20)

What fears have kept me from fulfilling the mission God made me to accomplish? What keeps me from telling others the Good News?

Day Thirty-seven

God wants to say something to the world through me

Remember: *"Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect."*

(1 Peter 3:15,16)

As I reflect on my personal story, who does God want me to share it with?

Day Thirty-eight

The Great Commission is MY commission

Remember: *"Send us around the world with the news of your saving power and your eternal plan for all humankind."*

(Psalm 67:2)

What steps can I take to prepare myself to go on a short-term mission experience next year?

Day Thirty-nine

Blessed are the balanced

Remember: *"Live life with a due sense of responsibility, not as those who do not know the meaning of life, but as those who do."*

(Ephesians 5:15)

Which of the four activities will I begin in order to stay on track and balance God's five purposes for my life?

Day Forty

Living with a purpose is the only way REALLY to live

Remember: *"For David ... served the purpose of God in his own generation."*

(Acts 13:36)

When will I take the time to write down my answers to life's five great questions? When will I put my purpose on paper?

God's Five Purposes

- Love God with all your heart – Worship
- Love your neighbour as yourself – Ministry
- Go and make disciples – Evangelism
- Baptise them into ... - Fellowship
- Teach them to do all things – Discipleship

Four Activities

- Talk it through with a spiritual partner or small group ~ Give yourself a regular spiritual check-up
- Write down your progress in a journal ~ Pass on what you know to others

Life's Five Great Questions

- What will be the **centre** of my life?
- What will be the **character** of my life?
- What will be the **contribution** of my life?
- What will be the **communication** of my life?
- What will be the **community** of my life?