

Sermon August 2, 2020

The Meaning of Life: Part 1 - Who Are We?

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today I am starting a series entitled *The Meaning of Life*. Many of us have a general idea about the meaning of life, but we may have a bit of trouble putting it into words when discussing the matter with others. So, thinking about it in this way may help give us the right words. Also, more and more people grow up with no church background or Sunday School learning, and the sources of their knowledge about the meaning of life is quite limited. The plan here is to take this series and present it as a video series on our website and YouTube. Then anyone can watch it anytime. Those videos will also help supplement our confirmation and adult instruction classes. Because of the intended use for this series, I apologize in advance if some of the material is old news to you or not much more than what you learned in Sunday School. However, I continue to observe that many people do benefit and enjoy a bit of a review. It brings to mind things once learned and forgotten, and it always helps to think about the deep things of God as we continue to try and makes sense out of this life. As basic as this series might be, the question of the meaning of life is as relevant as ever these days as we are beset with a violent surge of socialist/Marxist riots and demonstrations, as people push for a cancel culture environment, and as we experience a decline of the church in the west and confront a worldwide pandemic. We don't have to go very far to find someone who is asking, "What in the world is it all about?" I have broken this series down into 5 parts: Parts 1 and 2 deal with who we are; Parts 3 and 4 treat the subject of why we are here; and the final part will be about what direction we are heading.

So, let's get right into part 1 – who are we. It seems best that we start at the beginning. There are generally 3 main views of the origins of humanity. One position holds that all life evolved from non-living matter over billions of years through a random process of mutations and natural selection. We call that view Atheistic Evolution since it is the view held by most people who do not believe in the existence of God or that any Supreme Being played any role in the evolutionary process. A second view holds that life did develop through this evolutionary method, but God was behind the curtain pulling the strings and levers, purposefully guiding the process all the way through. This is known as Theistic Evolution and is held by people who believe in both the existence of God and that he caused the evolution of the universe. A third choice holds that God created all things out of nothing and things are the way they are not because they evolved into those forms but because that is how God made them from the start. I'm being very simplistic here, but that is my basic summary of the situation. It is critical to realize that all three views are driven by different kinds of faith. Evolution requires faith because no human was present to observe the process as it is described and the best minds in science have proven that the mathematical probability of evolution is zero. Theistic evolution does have the theistic part so that is an element of faith. Of course, the creation view also is based on the belief that God exists and created all things.

Today I am going to focus on the creation point of view, which we certainly can find much evidence for in the Bible and also in nature. Besides, the creation view is so much more fun and enjoyable to explore! So here we go. We get our start in the first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1 verse 26;

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Genesis 1:26

It was the Trinitarian God's idea that we humans should exist. We are not the result of chance, so that is something! We were created on purpose. When God said, "Let us make man in our image," that does not mean we look like God or have the same appearance. As best as we can tell, God the Father and the

Holy Spirit have no distinct form. Jesus has taken our human form. So, more than anything, God in Jesus looks like us. When God made us in his image, it means he created us with the same kind of consciousness, reason, and creative imagination that he has. We do not have the same capacity as God, but we do share some of these attributes with the divine. Paul drew upon this truth when he addressed the men of Athens;

“As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” Acts 17:28

Being created in the image of God is vitally important. It means that of all the things God created, people have the highest intrinsic value. This means all people, including the addict, the telemarketer on the phone, those still in the womb, and your grouchy neighbor have the highest value anything can have in the world. This also applies to you. You are much more than an individual collection of molecules with behaviors that stem from learned responses developed over millions of years along the road to survival. You bear the image of God and were created to be like God.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. Genesis 1:31

So, God said everything he made was very good. God was happy with all that he had made. Nothing needed to be added, removed, or changed. It was perfectly complete. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were also created completely good, immortal, and were free to enjoy creation and life together. What a wonderful world that must have been. It was what we might call Phase One.

Phase Two soon followed. Adam and Eve were created by God and thus they were subordinate to his gracious will. Nonetheless, they disobeyed God’s command that prohibited them from eating the forbidden fruit and in doing so they now had the capacity for evil. God warned they would have the knowledge and ability for both good and evil if they dishonored him, they disobeyed, and here we are. Now we all have the capacity for both good and evil in our thoughts, intentions, words, and deeds. And it follows that we all have good days and bad, ups and downs, pain and pleasure, and sometimes we’re right and sometimes we’re wrong. Daily life has become a roller coaster ride determined by how much good and how much evil we encounter along the way. Meanwhile, in our country alone, about 1 in 6 people take psychiatric drugs, 40 million have anxiety disorders, 16 million suffer from major depression, and each year there are some 15,000 murders and 50,000 people created in the image of God commit suicide. I thought I heard someone say we are making the world a better place. If that were possible, I think it would have happened a long time ago!

But God isn’t done with us yet. He did not throw us on the scrap heap. In the beginning we were created perfect. Now we are far from perfect, but we still bear the image of God. Right now, God is at work doing something beyond our wildest dreams and imagination that will make us into the kind of people God meant for us to be, and more. I’ll cover that exciting area next week in Part 2.

Until then, the peace of God guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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