

October 1, 2006

“Our Chief End and All Lesser Choices” (Psalm 23)

FCF: Directionless living

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of our chief end,
(magnet) we must seek to glorify God and to enjoy Him in all our decisions.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Over my vacation, I took to reading on astronomy and was particularly intrigued by the star, Polaris. Perhaps you know that, as you stand and look towards the sky, Polaris is always north of one’s position. Which is important not only for stargazing but if you lose your way at night. Or perhaps if you are trying to make your way in the dark. During the Civil War, this was how fugitive slaves found their way of escape to Canada.

My point? That we are all in need of a guide, a “star” pointing us to true north. And without it we are lost, directionless, stumbling in the dark. We need some idea of which way to go, a view of the big picture, a context to make decisions. And we have it.

This is part two of an introduction to our Vision Statement. An excursus, if you will, on decision making. What questions we should be asking and why?

SCRIPTURE READING: (Psalm 23)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Psalm 23 reveals God as the Shepherd of His people. Which means, among other things, He leads and guides us. Yet we take this image so for granted we fail to recognize its profound implications. “*Of course He’s our Shepherd,*” we say. But think with me. Think with me as to what this implies. To be guided implies, not only that there is a Guide, but that there is a path laid down, a purpose for our days, a destination in view. Whereas once we wandered around aimlessly through life, now we see direction and significance. In fact, that is so significant, we could simply stop there, pray and go home.

We now have, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, a “chief end.” (READ [WSC Q:1](#)) “*What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*” Thomas Vincent unpacked this by saying (READ [Vincent, p.13](#)):

The chief end of man, is that which man ought chiefly to aim at or design, to desire, seek after, and endeavor to obtain, as his chief good and happiness; unto which his life and his actions should be referred and directed...

This is not to say we are to have no other aims, designs, or desires but that they must all be ordered under this larger umbrella of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

This is an all encompassing end, a chief end. And, as such, it ought to play itself out in every arena, in every area, across the board in all the details of life – including the way we make decisions. The great and the small, the momentous and the minute. Why are we here? What is the intent of our Creator in fashioning us, our Provider in sustaining us, our Redeemer in saving us? To glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever.

That means something in terms of “vision” for a church as a whole. And for each of us individually as well. There’s something here for all of us and each of us. What does it mean to have such a “chief end”? Well, let’s wrestle with this for a few minutes.

I. TO GLORIFY GOD

To glorify God. God’s creation shows forth His glory (READ [Psalm 19:1](#)). As does His work of salvation (READ [Ephesians 1:6, 12-14](#)). But what does it mean?

A) Definition

1. What it is not

What does it mean to glorify God? Well, we know it cannot mean to add to His glory, to make Him more glorious for He cannot be made more glorious than He already is.

2. What it is

It is not to add to His glory. It is to direct attention towards His glory, off of us and onto Him. It is to manifest, showcase, display who He is and the wonders of His works.

B) Explanation

1. From deep within

It begins deep within as we see who God is and what He has done – progressively but never exhaustively – and come to trust Him, turn to, cling to, and lean upon Him.

2. In all of life

It begins deep within and then moves forth into all of life (**READ 1 Corinthians 10:31**). Our lips are to be full of praise, worshiping the God of glory – as His Word burrows deeply within us, our words echo back in adoration (**READ Psalm 29:1-2**). Spoken aloud and lived aloud as well – doing that which is good, obeying His commands, showing forth His character and work in our character and works (**READ Matthew 5:14-16**).

This is what we are made for. And it will surely be (**READ Habakkuk 2:14**).

Illustration:

Let me read the words of a king from long ago (**READ Daniel 4:34-35**). This was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. And he had it right. But only after he had had it very wrong. He had been a proud man, giving glory only to himself. He had been warned, he had flouted the warning, and had both his kingdom and his mind taken away. At the end of seven years, his kingdom and his mind were restored. And he gave glory to God.

Application:

What then does it mean to have as part of our chief end “to glorify God”? It means we must never begin by asking, “*What path will bring attention, praise, and glory to me and exalt my name?*” but “*What path will bring attention, praise, and glory to God and exalt His name?*” Now surely this has implications for us as a church and a statement of vision. But what about you? Standing at the crossroads, which way will you go? Marriage and career choices, purchase and investment decisions. What direction are you going, by what star will you navigate? What patterns in relationships and responses to circumstances do you see? What are you giving your life to? And who?

What will glorify God? What will demonstrate, necessitate trust in His promises? What has He commanded? What would most honor Him? How can you show forth His worthiness of our love and devotion? What will most tend towards the imitation of His character – doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly with Him? How can you show forth evidence of the Lord’s very real presence and power? And why is this so hard?

For it is. And it causes us to sing, “*Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy praise.*” For our hearts are so much out of tune. Our chief end is our chief struggle. But it’s what we were made for and He delights to lead us along the path.

II. TO ENJOY HIM FOREVER

To glorify Him. And to enjoy Him forever. This is worth considering as well.

A) Definition

1. What it is not

What does it mean? Again, what is it not? It’s not calling for a self-absorbed obsession with joy. But neither is it calling for a neglect of joy. For ours are hearts made to rejoice.

2. What it is

To rejoice in Him (**READ Psalm 34:8**). God's purpose for us is to delight in Him, to enjoy Him. Lesser things will not ultimately satisfy. We are made to see, to savor, to find our deep satisfaction in Him. And in this we find an unshakable steadiness. All other joys will give way – friends, health and beauty, money and things. All will fade and fail. But God will not. And neither need our joy in Him (**READ Habakkuk 3:16-19**).

B) Explanation

1. See and savor

Ours is to see and to savor who He is and have our thirst fully slaked (**John 7:37b-38**).

2. Find satisfaction

Ours is to be satisfied at the deepest level only in Him (**READ Psalm 16:11**).

Illustration:

Think of Mary at her sister Martha's house (**READ Luke 10:38-42**). Mary shows the way – how to enjoy Jesus, taking time, spending it with Him, finding joy in Him. But that isn't meant to be hurried. The "One Minute Devotional Bible" is an oxymoron.

This isn't about rushing but relishing and resting. And it's what we are made for.

Application:

(**READ Philippians 4:4**) Not relying upon cracked and poisoned wells to slake our thirst but going to the fountain Himself. This too has implications in the statement of a church's vision. Where are we resting? But again, "What about you?" Standing at the crossroads, by what "end" are you living? What have you made your "true north" in the confusion of these days? How do you make your choices? What are you demanding of your friends and family? Why is it you want to be beautiful and healthy? What is it you think that next big score is going to bring? Who or what are you pursuing as your joy?

Bring the questions out and work them through before the Lord. "*Where am I anxious, worried, and fretting? What crutch has been kicked out from under me?*" That will tell you who and what you are resting in, leaning upon for support and solace.

And, again, this causes us to sing all the more, "*Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy praise.*" For our hearts are out of tune. Our chief end is our chief struggle. But it's what we were made for and He delights to lead us along.

CONCLUSION:

For this is our chief end – to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. And He knows us well. Going through life is like listening to a sermon. "*Where is this going?*" we ask. And justifiably so. Well, our lives are meant to go somewhere. It's good news.

Listen. We have a "chief end," a star by which to navigate, a true north. No more needless stumbling in the dark. Think of Alice in Wonderland for a moment. You know the story and the scene between Alice and the Cheshire Cat (**READ Carroll quote**):

"Which way ought I go from here?" Alice asked. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where –" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go."

Oh, but Alice, it does matter which way you go. You matter and so too does the direction of your life and the choices you make along the way. We've been made with an end in mind, with significance and direction. We have a purpose – to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We don't have to wake up each day and work through what it is we're here for. The One who made us, the One who provides for us, the One who saved us has shown us and is guiding us along the way, helping us with each step towards this glorious goal. May that capture and enrapture our hearts – each of us and all of us together.

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