

**John Lee, Purpose**  
**Reading: Acts 13:22-36**

**April 3, 2016**

There are simply a lot of amazing people in the Bible, and there's also a lot of amazing paradoxes in the lives of those people, and probably for me there is no life that is more paradoxical in the Scriptures than David. In the passage that Jonathan read for us in Acts chapter 13, there is more written about David than any other person except Jesus in the Bible, and yet in a couple of verses--the one he started with and the one he ended in-- the writer of Acts Paul and Paul's speaking may tell us more about David than all of the verses in the Old Testament. Acts chapter 13 verse 22 is the verse from which we get the thought that David was a man after God's own heart. Now how do I handle that when I look at David and say there is a man who committed adultery, had her husband killed, had a son try to kill him, had rape and disrespect within his own family-- how do I take all of that and then come to the conclusion that, as the Scriptures did and I accept the Scripture, that he was a man after God's own heart? While part of, if maybe not most of, the answer may be found in the last verse Jonathan read for us where it says: David, after he had served his fathers and done the purpose of God, he died. David did apparently what was God's will and purpose for him in his life. Not every act, but when it was all totaled, David had done what God intended for David to do. David was not sinless, but probably he was for the most part faithful to God, and he was repentant when he wasn't sinless.

We're told from his own words that David loved the word of God. Psalms 119:97: "O how I love your law." He loved to pray. Psalms 116: "I will call upon him as long as I live." He loved to praise the Lord. Psalms 147: "It is good to sing praises to our God," and he did the purpose that God had for him in his life--Acts chapter 13 verse 36. Tim I thought very effectively talked about some memories or some days in his life that were very meaningful to him and we all have those thoughts, but if I were to ask you or ask myself what was the most important day in your life so far, how would you answer? Well for a Christian, a failsafe answer would be the day I accepted the Lord and was baptized and I don't know how to argue with that, but there are a multiplicity of days that I would have to say are very important to me. Mark Twain, who was not a particularly spiritually oriented person from what I can discern from his life, was asked that question and he said the two most important days in his life were number one the day he was born because without that, the question becomes rather meaningless, and number two the day he discovered why he was here. Now I'm not persuaded or convinced that Mark Twain really did discover why he was here, but he discovered why he thought he was here. I'm not but going to judge him, but I really like that--how important it is for us to come to grips with why we're here--our purpose. The word of God talks about purpose in our lives and in many ways and Acts chapter 11 verse 23 it says: "Exhort them that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord." Paul writing to Timothy in II Timothy chapter 3 verse 10 says: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, my manner of life, my purpose, my faith and my long-suffering. " One of Paul's great badges for those who followed the Lord that he followed was that people saw purpose in his life. In Acts 26:16 it says: "stand up for I have prepared you unto this purpose."

My mind went back to Esther chapter 4 where Mordecai had to look at young Queen Esther and says who knows but maybe the Lord has put you here for this very purpose.

Those are grand passages and grand stories, but it leaves me still with the question, why am I here? Why are you here? Maybe an important day in our life was when we got married, when we had our children, when we did this, when we did that--and those are grand days hopefully. We can do all of those without ever coming to grips with our purpose in life. In the 1980s there was a popular bumper sticker "He who dies with the most toys wins." Is that really our purpose? Centuries before that, Shakespeare wrote: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages." Shakespeare listed them: infancy, schoolboy, lover, soldier, middle-age, declining, old age, and the last scene of all which ends this strange eventful history is this second childishness and then mere oblivion. A little child looks for purpose and meaning in their lives. Maybe not to the depth that they will later, but you watch a little child and they're just amazed by what I call repetitive wonder. You toss a little child in the air. What does he say? Do it again, so you toss them in the air again. What does he say? do it again, and you do that until you tire of it. Not until they tire of it. The awe of repetitive wonder. What do you think God says to the sun every morning? Do it again! I don't know if he says that, but he set creation in such a way that it is just a series of repetitive wonders. GK Chesterton wrote, "Part of God's infinity is manifested in the little child's propensity to exalt in the monotonous." I don't know that it should be monotonous. I don't know that it is to the child and I don't know that our lives certainly shouldn't be to us, but there is a repetitiveness there. There's something wonderful about reliance on the dependable. One of the keys to a happy marriage, a happy family is dependability. That needn't be monotonous. I find it very comforting. The world of a child is also insightful, but the wonder of God is at the very center of meaning because God is like the sun-- SUN-- we can't look at it, but without it, we can't see anything. We can't see God. But without God we can't see anything else really that's meaningful or purposeful.

There was a TV show, not one that I would necessarily recommend, but probably many of you have watched it at least a little bit, that was just a sociological and psychological wonder. I don't think it's on anymore. Probably in reruns. It was called the *Seinfeld Show*, and what is so sociologically and psychologically fascinating about that show-- I'm not recommending it-- there were probably some funny parts and probably some parts that should've been there-- but it was a plotless show. There was no plot in *Seinfeld*. It was just one little 30,60, maybe 90 minute segment and then you'd go to another one, and pretty soon the half hour would pass. Sociologists wonder why was that such a popular show? One of the reasons to explain its popularity is it mimics many people's lives--a purposeless, plotless, meaningless existence, and therefore people got a kick out of may be feeling their life wasn't so bad because it was without purpose, a decaffeinated life, if you will-- one with no lead, one without gusto, but there's a commercial that probably would get me in a little bit of trouble with that, an old commercial. The Bible is also very clear as to what our purpose is. There are many tangents and segments of this, but I think in its most simplistic terms--we find this in

Ephesians chapter 1 verses 6,12, and 14. Our purpose is ultimately to bring glory to God. And if you and I live our lives in such a way that it brings glory to God, then we've got the purpose that I think he intended for us. Secondly, I would have to go to the Great Commission and say our purpose is also to spread the Word and grow the kingdom. We have other important things to do--raising our family, having integrity in our jobs, providing for them. Those are not unimportant, but in the scheme of things, they are quite secondary to bringing glory to the name of God and spreading his kingdom. We are made to fulfill our purpose.

To live a life without purpose is basically like walking on the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the Dead Sea because it has no outlet. A dead life is a dead life because it has no outlet for achievement and purpose. Only the Creator can tell the created what its purpose is. Too often we try to self define our purpose, but a purpose or calling assumes a caller, and God is the caller; we're the called. Too often our lives may be have not the purpose God wants because we're living them outside of his divinely determined purpose. Now for us it may not be as dramatic as Jeremiah, when in Jeremiah chapter 1 verse five God says about Jeremiah even before he was born, "You are ordained as a prophet." Maybe God said that about you or me before we were born. I don't know. We don't have any record of it. That doesn't mean we don't have purpose. In Psalms 139, a passage that we often use for our objection to abortion, David is through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit going back into his mother's womb and talking about things before he was born. I don't think David remembered those. I think that was in divine inspiration. He says God knew him before he came out. God knitted him together. God had a purpose for him. That's what makes Acts 13:36 so incredible where it says David served the Lord according to the purpose that God had for him even while maybe he was in his mother's womb. In Romans 11:36, we are told "For of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." That's our purpose. With a kingdom worldview, those who are that we come in contact with are those who we affect, but we also infect if we're doing God's purpose. It is not my task here on earth to simply affect people; it is my task to infect people with the word of God by sharing it with them. I think coming to grips with our purpose is so critical to having the kind of life not only God wants us to have, but having a fulfilled life.

Let me just give you maybe two or three or four reasons I believe that. I believe coming to grips with our purpose in life **allows us to truly be fulfilled**, not just happy but fulfilled. In John chapter 10 verse 10 Jesus talks about he wants his disciples to have "abundant life." There's a song we sing sometimes "More Abundantly." Everybody here has gone through a drive through fast food restaurant or gone into a fast food restaurant, and they make it very easy. You can just say I want number one, you can say I want number two, or I want number five, and some may say I want number one, number two, and number five. They call it super sizing; they say would you like to supersize this order? We've all read articles about the wisdom of saying no when they say that, but it sure tastes good. But in a spiritual sense, God wants to supersize our lives. He wants to make our lives as full as they can be; that's what living more abundantly is. It comes about when we come to grips with our purpose. This is a generalization, and there are exceptions to what I'm going to say next. But I think many

suicides and divorces often occur because people feel unfulfilled. They don't have that abundant life that you can only have when you come to grips with why you're really here. And then you do something about it. Lack of fulfillment is often tied to artificial fulfillment that doesn't last. Men find in their careers as they go up the ladder of success and then later on find the tragedy that they got their ladder leaning against the wrong wall. What good does it do to climb the ladder of success if the ladder is not on the right wall? If we don't have the purpose God has for us.

Secondly, I think coming to grips with the purpose God has given us **gives a sense of direction to our lives**. In I Corinthians chapter 9 and in other places, but in the latter part of I Corinthians 9 verse 26 and following, Paul uses the metaphor, our life is a race. He is not the only one to use that and that's not the only place he uses it, but a race only has meaning if it has direction. If we went out here and said, "on your mark, get set, go!" and there was no ascribed finish line, then who knows who won? Many people just don't have direction to their lives. Many take a pay raise, even if it takes them further away from God's purpose, from God's family.

I think thirdly coming to grips with our purpose will **give us stability in our lives**. In Ephesians chapter 4 warns us not to be tossed about, blown here and there by every wind of doctrine. That happens when people don't have a divine perspective on God's purpose for them. Stuff will always come up, but God's purpose or a sense of his purpose in our lives allows us to handle that stuff in a way that doesn't panic. You don't panic if you know where you're going, even if you're not quite sure how to get there. You panic when you absolutely don't know where you're at and have no idea how to get where you're at, because you don't know where you're at. That sentence could probably go on for another moment or two. In Philippians chapter 4 Paul says, "I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content." You can only do that-- he can only say that-- because he knew his purpose in life. Therefore, it really didn't matter if he had two shirts or two cars. I guess it would've been pairs of sandals or donkeys back then. That didn't matter to Paul because that wasn't his purpose.

Fourthly, I think it's such a grand thing because **it answers the question of significance**. God's purpose is what gives us significance in our lives, that we matter. People cannot succeed-- you and I, nobody can succeed without a sense of purpose, a sense of significance, not artificial but true divine purpose. Paul writing in Romans chapter 12 the first couple of verses that you're all familiar with tells us not to be conformed to this world but be transformed so that we come to grips with our purpose-- being a living sacrifice, our purpose. The kingdom we are called to is the antithesis of the kingdom from which we are called from because of our purpose. He goes on in verse two says be transformed, the clearing of a confused mind. James in James chapter 1 talks about being double minded, a confused mind. Why? because the lack of purpose. Our purpose and our motivation for doing is so important. Let me ask you-- can Satan do good works? Can Satan do good works? Well, I don't mean that as a trick question, but there is a semantical issue to that. I don't believe Satan can do good works. I do believe Satan can do good deeds, but in a biblical perspective good works glorify God. Satan doesn't glorify God. He can do good things, but they're not good

works because his motive isn't to glorify God. People can do good things, but they may not be good works because their motive isn't to glorify God. Bad people can do bad things for bad reasons. But bad people do good things for bad reasons. Only the redeemed can do good things for the right reason because they're the only ones that will be motivated to do it.

There are basically two elements of motivation. One is called extrinsic and one is called intrinsic and they both have their place, but they are both quite different. Extrinsic motivation is the most common. Let me give you a couple of examples of extrinsic. Extrinsic simply means we're motivated by something external. You're trying to get a young child to take a bath and you say if you'll take a bath I'll give you . . . candy. That's not a sin to get a kid in the bathtub by promising candy, but that is an external extrinsic motivation. We might tell them you get X number of A's on your report card and you'll get this or you get a dollar for every A, maybe it's five dollars now. I don't know what it is now. It was \$.50 at our house and I never had to pay out very often. But things have changed, but those are extrinsic then and that's not bad. God uses extrinsic motivation: to the Children of Israel he said if you obey you will prosper. That's extrinsic. The reward was external but it's the lesser of the two motives. That's the key. Intrinsic motivation is when we are motivated not by something external but by something in us. It's the most mature motivation, the greatest motivator because it touches our internal senses. Let's do it because it's right. Let's do it because we love the Lord, not simply because we're afraid of hell. Being afraid of hell is an appropriate feeling, but I think that's what the Scripture talks about when it says the fear of God-- extrinsic motivation is the beginning, but then perfect love casts out fear. I don't think we ever reach perfect love. So I think fear of what could happen to us is always somewhat appropriate in our life, but as we mature our motivations become more intrinsic. Those of us that are older that still have parents alive, we now honor them because we love them and earlier we obeyed them because we're going to get whipped if we didn't. Both of those were appropriate at the right time in the right place, but isn't the intrinsic the more mature. The purpose in our lives is to glorify God, not simply because of what will happen to us if we don't, although that is an important factor, it is because of our intrinsic motivation. That's what we want to do.

Now the actions may be absolutely the same. I could come here this morning simply because of extrinsic motivation, but to really worship and praise God I need to also come here because of intrinsic motivation. You can't tell; I'm here. I can't tell; you're here, but you know and God knows our purpose and our motive in life. I believe we all have a purpose. We all have a calling. I gave you two callings that are kind of the umbrella callings. Within that there are many ways to glorify God, and based upon our talents, based upon our opportunities. We may be doing it some different ways. Some of us can teach, some of you can sing, some of you can take care of the needy. There's all kinds of ways to glorify God. The important thing is that we do it, isn't it? That we do it.

Several years ago and it may be several decades ago, there was a movie called *Chariots of Fire* and it centered around I think he was a Scottish or Irish runner, Eric

Liddell, who in the 1924 Olympics chose not to run in the hundred meter dash although he was the prohibitive favorite because it fell on a day that would've violated his religious conscience. A little bit like Sandy Colfax. When I was growing up, Sandy Kovacs was an ace pitcher for the Dodgers and he chose not to pitch on a certain World Series game because it fell on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur. I didn't agree with his religion but I've always remembered that. Eric Liddell chose not to run because of that. That's not what I want to talk to you about. His primary competitor in the hundred meter for the gold was a man by the name of Harold Abrams. Harold Abrams went ahead and ran the hundred meter in the finals in the 1924 Olympics and won the gold. Harold Abrams was asked a couple of questions. First of all, before the race he was asked, Do you hate losing? and what must've been a moment of arrogance he said I don't know. I never have. He ran the race and won the gold. He was then asked, How excited are you now to finally have won the gold? With a less than gleeful face, he looked at the reporter with sadness and he said, " I used to be afraid to lose, but now I'm afraid to win because in those 10 seconds, I have proven the reason for my existence and now I don't know why I'm here." His purpose in life was to win that race, not a sinful thing to want to do. The sad thing is, once he won it, he had no purpose left in his life and he spent years of depression. He lived another 50 years as a journalist in England, but he lived many of those years depressed because he had done what he thought his purpose in life. The beautiful thing for a Christian is you never get to that point. You've always got purpose in life; you always can glorify God, and with it comes great joy. Harold Abrams ran the 100; he won it and it sent him into decades of despondency, not because he won it, but because it removed his purpose in life. When God says this is your purpose in life, it's a wonderful blessing that we need to grasp.

Aristotle said " life without divine purpose is a life of nothingness" and then he went on and made an interesting statement. He said "nothingness is that which rocks dream about." What he was saying is you want to live your life without purpose? You might as well be a rock. That's what a rock does. Oh I know you can think of rocks that have a purpose, but that is because we pile them up into some form and give them some purpose, but the rock doesn't have a purpose. God has made us so much more, hasn't he? It was AW Tozer, as I wind down, who said, "May not the inadequacies of much of our spiritual experience be traced back to our habit of skipping through the corridors of the kingdom like children in a marketplace, always chattering about everything but pausing to learn the true value of nothing." I find that rather penetrating. In Acts chapter 13, "And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king to whom also he gave testimony and said I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, which shall fulfill all of my will. For David, after he had served his own generation according to the purpose of God, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption ."

As I close I'd like to read that last verse and leave that one word out--and you fill it in: " And [put your name there/ my name] after we have served our generation according to the purpose that God has for our lives, we will fall asleep and be laid with our fathers." It seems to me that's the very essence of why we need to be here. I did a little paraphrasing on that last verse as I quoted the second time, but I don't think I took it out

of context. Wouldn't that be wonderful if in the Judgment Day, God would look at each one of us and say you served according to the purpose that I had in mind for you. He may say that to me. I don't know, but if he does I've still got a ways to go and maybe so do you. We're going to close our thoughts this morning and extend the gospel invitation. I know that one of God's purposes for each of our lives is to be his children, to be motivated extrinsically but to grow so that we're also motivated intrinsically because that is by far the most powerful motivator. Love motivates us so much further than fear. It doesn't mean that fear doesn't have its place. It just has its limits. If we can help anybody in any way, we invite you to come as we stand and sing.