

God's Eternal Purpose

Transcribed and edited for clarity from a message spoken by Neil Buckman in April, 2014 in Chennai, India

Let us read from a very familiar passage in Ephesians:

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. (Ephesians 3:8-12)

Prayer:

Our loving Father, as we open Your Word together, we ask for Your grace that will enable us to hear Your voice. Lord, we ask that You would minister to our hearts. Deliver us from that familiarity which prevents us from seeing more of Yourself. Lord, we know we can receive nothing unless it comes from above, so we commit our time to You. And Lord, we ask that You would give us that portion You prepared for us from before the foundation of the world. We bless You for Your faithfulness and for that anointing that enables us to speak, hear and translate Your Word. We bless Your name, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Hidden mystery of God

Most of us are very familiar with this passage. When I was thinking of this I asked why this purpose of God was hidden in God throughout all the ages. The eternal purpose of God is what God always intended to do. But this purpose was hidden. So throughout all those centuries people thought that they knew what God was doing, but, in fact, His real purpose was hidden. Why was it hidden? Why did not He simply tell them what He was going to do?

Unfolding of God's mystery

The answer is that it was not possible to tell them until the Lord Jesus was revealed. There was no way to understand God's purpose until He was seen. But we know that even after the Lord Jesus came and was working miracles and teaching, still His purpose was not revealed. Even at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came, still it was not revealed. Only later Paul and others began to see and to understand this mystery of God.

It wasn't simply that the Lord Jesus must first come, but also that He must die. Until His death had been seen, and His resurrection, and not simply witnessed as an event but actually seen and understood in the Spirit, only then could God's purpose begin to be understood.

So, what we can say is that the coming of the Lord Jesus was not simply the means by which God would accomplish His eternal purpose, *but that the Lord Jesus is that Purpose. He is not simply the means, He is the end.*

So then to understand what God's purpose is, we have to look very clearly and closely upon the Lord Jesus. And as we gaze upon Him and look upon His wonder, then slowly, slowly, He begins to open up to us what God is doing.

Incarnation - a Man

So where do we begin? We begin in Bethlehem. We begin with this extraordinary, completely unexpected event. We can be very casual, and we can say, "Well, the Lord Jesus came into the world". We can say, "Well, this was very amazing because He was born of a virgin". But that is not really the point is it? The point is that this was not simply a birth, but this was incarnation. Somehow God became a man. The eternal Son entered into time and became a human being.

I think that actually we have a little bit of a problem here that is the reverse of the problem that the first believers had. The first believers looked upon the Lord Jesus and they saw a man. Then slowly, slowly, as they listened to Him speaking they said, "You know these are not the words that a man can speak. No man ever spoke like this man". The simplest things that the Lord Jesus said reveal this. He said, "Your sins are forgiven". We are used to that, it is a familiar thing to us. But when the people first heard this Man say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' they could not believe their ears. "How could a man speak like that? Who does He think He is?" It is just wonderful to hear the things He spoke.

Our problem is, as I said, the reverse. When we look upon the Lord Jesus we see the Son of God, we see the Lord of glory. We see the eternal One who is now at the Father's right hand. It is easy for us to forget that He is a human being. He is a man. If we take the smallest part of that truth, He is a man.

I heard somebody explain this once. This is the best explanation I have heard. "He is a man, but He is God. He is God but He is a man." There you are - fully explained! No, there is no explanation. Here is a mystery beyond us. How could the fullness of the Godhead dwell bodily in a man? We cannot answer that. But we look upon Him and we see a man.

We remember in Genesis the Lord said, "Let us make man in our image". He formed Adam out of the dust. Then what did He do? He breathed into him and He became a living soul. God said that His creation was very good. His heart-desire was to create man in His own image. This creation was very good. But of course we know what happened. Soon this creation became very corrupt. All through the centuries God saw this creation as it is: defiled and dead.

Perfect Man

But, now there is a Man. There is one Man. God can look upon this Man and His heart just bursts with joy. “This is my beloved Son. Here, this Man, this human being, satisfies all of My heart’s desire”. And the Holy Spirit came upon Him and made His home in Him because He had perfect rest in this Man. There was no contradiction, there was no resistance, there was nothing fallen. God had peace and fellowship in this Man. So the Father rejoiced in His Son and the Holy Spirit rejoiced in the Son.

How did the Lord Jesus like to refer to Himself? What he preferred most was “the Son of Man”. He rejoiced to be Man. We remember that the creation of humanity was a special creation, and now we can see some movement. Now we can see God is working. God is going to accomplish something. Finally, finally, God has a Man that it is a joy to His heart.

What was the difference between this Man and the rest of the humanity? In the beginning of John’s gospel we have the answer.

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

There was only one life like this. The life was the light. But the light was shining in a very dark place. All of humanity were the children of Adam. But this Man had another life. It was that life which separated Him from the rest of humanity.

The Tree of Life

Again we go back to the garden. This is the place where man fell. This is the place where man ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and said, “I shall be like God”. This is where man said, “I can go alone”. We know that that choice was a disaster, but we look around in the garden and we see something. What do we see? Another tree - the Tree of Life.

We don’t know anything about this tree, but we see that in this tree there is another life. It was not the life man had, it was a different life. We say, “Well, if God wanted man to have this other life, why did He not just give it to him? Why did not God just say something and give to the man this life?” The answer is that He could not. Why not? Because, Adam was a **created** being, but this life was an **uncreated** life. The uncreated could not be in the created. But we can see God wanted man to have that life. He had made that man and that man was very good. There was nothing wrong with that man. But he was a created being, and there was something more God wanted to give him.

Divine Life

We come back to the Lord Jesus and we say, “Hallelujah. Here is the man in whom is an uncreated life.” We see this life as light shining. We see the love that flowed from this life. We see the perfection of this life. We see the wisdom of this life. We see the power of this

life. You know that the first man fell in a moment. But when Satan threw everything at this last Man He did not fall. He triumphed. This was a victorious life. This was an unquenchable life. This was the life that could meet every need. The Lord Jesus said, "He who comes to me will never hunger. He who believes me will never thirst".

So, we look upon the Lord Jesus and we say, "This is what God wants". Here is Man - this is the man God always wanted. But, of course, there is only one problem. There is only one of Him, one man. In all of humanity, there is but one.

Crucifixion and death as a Man

So we read something from the Gospel of John, chapter 12. We read about certain Greek men coming and wanting to see Jesus. They said, "We wish to see Jesus". But something strange happened. So many people had come to the Lord Jesus. He never tired of receiving them and ministering to them. But John says in chapter 12 verse 23,

"But Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.'"

So what do we have here? Jesus spoke about a grain of wheat. There is a big difference between a grain of wheat and a small stone. It might look the same. But the difference is that in the grain of wheat there is life. So you can hold your grain of wheat and say, "I have a living grain of wheat".

I was told that in the pyramids of Egypt there was wheat. It had remained there all those centuries. But if a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies what is the end? The end is now I have 100 grains of wheat. One grain has become a hundred grains. We say, "Well, in that first grain there was life." What about these 100 grains? In these 100 grains there is life. How much of the life of the first grain is in each of these 100 grains? Is it one hundredth? No, the whole of the life is in each and every grain.

We can hear what the Lord Jesus is saying. "These men want to come and see Me. They will come in, we will talk, they will leave. They will go away with a memory. They will have spoken with Me. They will have learnt something from Me. But nothing will have changed, because I am still only one". He says, "The hour has come." There cannot be only one. There must be many, many men and women sharing this life.

So we follow the Lord Jesus. We know what He meant when He said, "The hour has come". It is the hour in which He was going to die. So we look upon the Lord Jesus in His death. We see something that we cannot understand. How can Messiah die? How can the Son of God die? Nobody could understand this. If you had an argument from the Bible, you could have shown from the Bible that it can't happen. If anyone is crucified he is cursed. How can Messiah be cursed? Come on, tell me! So, we could not understand how He could die.

Death of sins, sinners, things of darkness, and death

If we were there on that day, we would have seen something too horrible to describe. But we now see that there was more to that death. It was not simply that He died. We begin to understand there was more than this. He was a sin offering. Our sins were upon Him. He died bearing our sins. Nobody expected this.

But then we find there is more. We find it was not merely my sins. But it was me, myself. Somehow I died. When the Lord Jesus was upon the cross He gathered into Himself so much. He gathered into Himself all the sins of the world. He gathered into Himself all the sinners too.

Everything in this world that was against God, which was of the prince of darkness, of his realm, was judged in His death.

And what was the last thing that died? Death itself! Scripture says that He abolished it. He abolished death. In Him death died.

His death was a death beyond anything that we could have imagined. We see that God is doing something nobody ever dreamed of or could have imagined or asked for. He is accomplishing His own purpose. Nobody understood. Many wept, but nobody understood. The Lord Jesus died alone. He was giving Himself up to His Father to do His Father's will. He found Himself forsaken of the Father. What a death! But of course we cannot comprehend this. We cannot understand this. It is beyond us.

Resurrection and new humanity

Then we follow Him a little further. We see that the Lord has risen. We are glad that He is risen. What do we see here? We see something miraculous. This is extraordinary. I saw the dead body. He was dead, but now he lives. This is a miracle.

But what do we see? This happened before, did it not? Did it? Everybody knows about Lazarus. Lazarus was dead and after four days the Lord Jesus called him out. I read a story. This story was written as if Lazarus himself had written it. Lazarus said, "I was very ill. It was becoming harder and harder for me to breathe. I knew I was dying. Then I remember nothing until I heard a voice calling my name, 'Lazarus, come out' and I walked out." Lazarus lived. He was dead, but now he was alive. This is a wonderful thing. Lazarus was dead until there was a loud voice calling, "Lazarus, come out".

What happened next to Lazarus? This is what happened to Lazarus. He had his second funeral. Lazarus came back but he came back to be the man he was and then he died again.

But the Lord Jesus did not do this. He conquered death. He did not come back to be the man that He was. He overcame death. He came back as a new man. When He went into death, He carried the sins of the world. When He emerged from death, they were gone.

Death was left in death. Sin was left in death. I was left in death. The One who emerged is a new man.

When we hear the Lord Jesus after His resurrection He was very careful in what He said to His disciples. Do you remember what He said to Mary? Not a word is wasted.

“Go and tell my brothers that I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”

Who is speaking? A man! A human being!

When we look upon the Lord Jesus we hear him say, “Touch me and see I am not ghost. I am a Man. Touch me”. And then (I love this) He says, “Have you anything to eat?” I imagine that the disciples were searching and giving something to Him to eat. He stands in front of them and eats. He ate fish and honeycomb. When He was gone, they had the plate with the fish bones and a little bit of honeycomb. He stood amongst us. He is a man. He is real. But He is gone. He did not walk out.

This is a different man. He is a part of this created realm. But He is also a part of the invisible realm. This man belongs in both. This is truly a new humanity.

Ascension and glorification as a Man

We were saying that God had a purpose. This purpose is accomplished in the Lord Jesus. We followed Him and we have seen (Hallelujah!) a Man in whom is life. Then we have seen that the Man died and we see that we have died with Him. But we know that this grain of wheat was not to remain alone. We see Him risen. If you were in Him when He died, where were you when He rose? In Him! In Him! A new humanity!

Has He finished? Has God accomplished His purpose? We have a new humanity. Answer: No. He was not finished. There is one more thing.

Of course we cannot understand this - after the Lord Jesus had risen, there was one more step. He was glorified. Was He not glorious enough? No. The Father raised Him, gave Him a name about every name, raised Him up to the highest place, glorified Him at His own right hand. What shall we say? Of course He is raised up because He is the Son of God. That is where He belongs. But that is not the point. The point is that as we gaze up there, as we look up into heaven, we see the One there who is at the Father’s right hand, the One who has a name about every name. Upon whom we are looking? A man! A human being! He is there.

The Church, the Body of Christ

God had a purpose which He accomplished in His Son. Now Paul writes that when we look upon the Lord Jesus, we see Him raised up and we see that He is made the Head of everything. He is the Head of the church. Then what does Paul see? The church. He sees the church. He sees the church. Can you see it here? Who are you looking upon? You are

looking upon the Lord Jesus in the highest place. What are you seeing? You are seeing Him and you are seeing His redeemed Ones, the church, which is His Body. This is such a wonderful mystery.

Sometimes, we think persons can be separated from their body. I can't - I am me – when you see me, you see my body. This is a great mystery.

God has accomplished His eternal purpose in His Son. Truly we can say *He is not simply the means, He is the end*. This is all very wonderful.

The reality is in our spirit

But where is the reality of this? Well, we can say the reality is in the heavens, the reality is at the Father's right Hand. But I say something else. The reality is in you. Where has it been made real? When I look at myself, I don't see glory. I see weakness and failure. I don't feel purity. I am deeply conscious of my sins. In fact, as I have grown in the Lord, I have become more conscious of my sinful condition.

So, where is this reality? The Lord Jesus has ascended. He said, "It is finished". The victory has been won. It is all been done. It is finished. It is established. Where? In the spirit, in your spirit, that part of you that you can't really get your hands on.

If I say to you, "Tell me about your body". You say, "I am this tall, I have black hair, and I have big brown eyes". It is very easy, is it not? Then tell me about your soul. "Well, I am a happy person. I am very intelligent. I can talk a lot about myself". Then I say, "Tell me about your spirit". Very difficult! When we turn with our mind to see our spirit, the mind cannot see it, hands cannot touch it. But man has a spirit.

Indwelling Spirit

The Holy Spirit has come to dwell in man. So I ask, "Has the Holy Spirit come to dwell in you?" Where is He? Is He here or there? Where is He? What do you say? Sometimes we feel He is here. Sometimes we feel He is not anywhere at all. But the reality is that the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in our spirit. The Scripture says that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. The Holy Spirit is very particular about where He lives. He will not live in an unclean place. When He came to dwell in me, He did not come to dwell in an unclean place - He came to dwell in one who is washed, who is cleansed from all unrighteousness. This reality, this glory of the risen Lord, is a reality in the spirit.

What if we had eyes to see our spirit? Probably we would be blinded by the glory of what we saw. The Holy Spirit Himself is dwelling in our spirit.

In Ephesians 3:12 Paul said,

"...in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him".

Very often we feel very small. We feel we can't approach God. We feel very far away. But Paul said that in Christ we have confidence. If you, just for a moment, believe that what God has accomplished is an established reality in your spirit, then you will have boldness. You will see what an open door there is into His presence.

Complete salvation

Our salvation is not finished. In the Scripture we read about some things which are finished and we also read about some things which are not finished. On the one hand, we read that we have been justified, and glorified. But on the other hand we read we have to hold fast, we have to press on. So the work is finished in our spirit, but it has just begun in our soul. God is working transformation in our lives. He is teaching us to live out of the spirit, while the world has only taught us to live out of the body and out of the soul. So this work will be continuing. Finally, the Lord will deal with the last part - He will deal with the body.

Sometimes I tell people that I am not going to Heaven. Are you going to Heaven? I am not. I am going to Earth. A new creation! That is where the Scripture ends. There is a new Heaven and new Earth. We shall be changed. We will have bodies. We don't know much about that, but God likes bodies. When He created man this is the thing that He created. Who can imagine the glory of that new creation? It says that death will be swallowed up by life. That glory which is unseen in our spirit will be fully revealed in our soul and our body. Then we have the beginning of the eternal ages.

Let us pray.

Loving Father, we bless You and thank You for the mystery of Your beloved Son. We magnify You Lord. We magnify You. You have done what no man could have imagined or dreamed. Even now we barely begin to understand what is on Your heart. But we see the first fruits in your beloved Son. We rejoice that the first fruits are just the beginning of the harvest. Lord, we are coming and we shall see You face to face. We shall glorify You for ever and ever. We shall say "Grace! Grace! Grace! Glory to God in the Highest". Lord we pray that You would preserve us for that day and enable us to press on and to receive all that is on Your heart that Your children should have. We commit to You our time together this weekend. Build us up together. Glorify Your Son in the midst of us. We ask this in Jesus' precious Name. Amen.