

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Quinquagesima (2022)

The Purpose Driven Life of Christ:

Rev. Toby Byrd

“And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” (Luke 18:31–34, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today presents two types of blind people, the spiritually blind and the physically blind. But, of the two, it is the spiritually blind who are to be pitied more, because, as the psalmist tells us the spiritually blind, ***“have eyes, but do not see,” (Psalm 135:16 (ESV).*** St. Luke makes this emphatic point when describing the disciples, saying: ***“they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (v. 34).***

How true is this of thousands of nominal Christians today! They go with Jesus to Jerusalem and witness the details of the Lenten story but remain blind to its real significance. The blind beggar at least knew that he was blind, and as Jesus passed by, he cried out for help, and Jesus helped him. This same Jesus, while on the road to Jericho is willing to stop and open the eyes of a blind beggar is also, while we are on the road to eternity, ever willing to reach out to us and cure our spiritual blindness by opening our eyes of faith. Thus, this morning, let us with the help of the Holy Spirit give ear to *The Purpose Driven Life of Christ* who came into the world for one *purpose*, to save sinners such as ourselves (2 Tim. 1:15).

St. Luke tells us that as Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, He took them aside and said, ***“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” (vv. 31-33)*** But the disciples had no idea what Jesus was speaking about. They did not understand the *purpose* for which Christ came into the world. Even though they were with Him for most of His ministry, they did not understand when He said, ***“the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, ESV)*** or when He said, ***“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” (Luke 4:43, ESV)*** Nor did they understand when He said at His trial before Pilate, ***“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:37, ESV)*** Such was *The Purpose Driven Life of Christ*, to bring eternal life to all who hear the Good News of the kingdom of God and believe.

Now, when we think of *The Purpose Driven Life of Christ*, it’s easy for us who are familiar with the book, to recall Rick Warren’s book entitled *The Purpose Driven Life*. This book, originally published in 2002 has been read by thousands. It has been used for Bible studies and sermons throughout many churches. Many extoll its virtues. But the book is primarily a book about self-sanctification. All the *purpose* proscriptions in the book are singular, that is, they are an individual’s statement of how they can successfully ensure their salvation by what role their

life should take, by defining what is the center of their life, what type of character or person they should be, what contributions to life should they make, how they will communicate their character to others (their mission statement), and who will be in their circle of friends. Rick Warren couches these proscriptions of self-sanctification by quoting various and loose translations of Scripture. Now, to be fair, these Scriptural guides are meant to be used by the reader as guides for making their *purpose* statements, but there is one great problem, the one who is at the center of these *purposes* is the reader, not Christ.

It is all about the individual, what they believe is right for them in defining the *purpose* of their life. Not once are they reminded that of all the times the word *purpose* is used in Holy Scripture, it primarily points to the *purpose* of God for us, not our *purpose* for living the sanctified life. Furthermore, the book completely omits the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the Sanctifier of all, including those who would be self-sanctifiers. The book replaces the Spirit of God with the spirit of man, while forgetting the *purpose* for which our Lord Jesus came into this world: to save sinners just like us.

So, I would urge all of you, when you think of your *purpose* in this life, to first ask God to give you spiritual sight that you may see and know His *purpose* for you is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of His holy Son, Jesus Christ who came to give His life upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Through His life, death, and resurrection He defeated Satan's hold on you and opened God's heart to forgive you and justify you before Him. This was and is *The Purpose Driven Life of Christ*.

We see that St. Luke begins our Gospel Reading for today by telling us that Jesus addressed His disciples, saying, ***“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished” (v. 31)***. The disciples, as true Israelites, were familiar with the prophecies concerning the Messiah. To remind them of what was prophesied, Jesus lays out six events that the Messiah must endure: He will be delivered to the Gentiles; He will be mocked; He will be shamed; He will be spit upon; He will be flogged; and He will be killed (vv. 32-33). Now one must wonder why the disciples couldn't comprehend these plain facts. There's only one plausible answer, it didn't agree with their reason. Somehow or other a suffering and dying Savior didn't fit into the picture they had painted of Jesus. They had seen rays of His hidden glory and had been assured of ***“greater things than these” (John 1:50)***. Therefore, they envisioned Jesus as a king in royal apparel, sitting on the throne of David, surrounded by princely courtiers, with a mighty army at His disposal. And somewhere in that picture they see themselves in positions of honor and distinction. Surely Jesus cannot mean what He is saying regarding the shame, mockery, scourging, suffering, and death He must suffer — these things are out of the question. Surely, His words must mean something else. The disciples could not understand because they followed their reason instead of the clear words of our Lord. They remained blind to the gracious mystery which Jesus had revealed to them. Oh, how the disciples needed to pray: “Lord, open the eyes of our understanding, that we may see.”

Admittedly, like the disciples, we, too, have a different picture in our minds of our Savior's kingdom as well as the way He ought to establish His kingdom. Why should Jesus suffer to enter His glory? Instead of believing the clear Word of God, our hearts prompt us to ask: “Could it be possible that God could be so cruel as to force His own Son into suffering and death? Is it not a farce that an innocent man should suffer in the place of a guilty one? Is God really the God of Love if His wrath can only be stilled by the sacrifice of His Son? Or can God claim to be the almighty power if He is not able to remove sin unless it is atoned for by the death of His Son?” To make matters worse progressives, both religious and secular, sneer at what they are pleased to call “the blood religion of the Bible.” Pompously they declare that the suffering of Jesus was not only unnecessary but that the doctrine of His vicarious atonement is unworthy of God.

Indeed, ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14 ESV)***. Lord, help us see the true *purpose* of Your Son.

Truth is that the requirement of Jesus to go to Jerusalem remains a mystery to us until the eyes of our understanding are opened so that we may see that Jesus goes there to be the Substitute for our sin. Man is rebellious, separating himself from God by always going against God’s holy will, thereby he dooms himself to eternal death. Isaiah tells us, ***“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2 ESV)***. Ever since our first parents’ transgression in the Garden of Eden, the curse of Adam has fallen on all men. St. Paul reminds us, ***“sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Romans 5:12 ESV)***. Furthermore, there is no way for us, by our own effort, to escape from this doom. All the attempts of man, all the best human derived *purpose* statements, are in vain. Man’s history is replete with his efforts at covering his sin with the garments of his own righteousness; but all his best works are nothing more than filthy rags, (Is. 64:6). So I ask, what good will your fine-spun arguments of human reason, your self-proclaimed *purposes* be worth when you stand face-to-face before the righteous Judge and He says to you, “Depart from me you who thought you could save yourself by your plan. You failed to understand it is I, not you, who alone could fulfill the *purpose* of My Father in heaven for your salvation”?

St. Paul tells us, ***“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28, ESV)*** No man can fulfill God’s holy demands, but God put forth His mercy and truth, His righteousness and peace in the incarnation of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to fulfill His *purpose* for you. Again St. Paul reminds us, ***“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Galatians 4:4-5 ESV)***. The very Son of God was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and our peace with God was procured at the cost of His beloved Son’s death upon the Altar of the Cross at Jerusalem. The very place that our Lord Jesus reminded His disciple they were headed. Only by His suffering, death, and resurrection at Jerusalem could the world be redeemed.

The blind beggar cried out to Jesus because he was living in darkness. Jesus heard the blind man’s plea and came to Him, saying, ***“Recover your sight; your faith has made you well” (v. 42)***. This same Savior who gave the blind beggar sight, comes also to you. When you are groping in the darkness of sin, crushed by its weight, He comes to you, opening your eyes of faith so you may see Him as your Savior. That you may know that His sin-atonement sacrifice has reconciled you to God, and that God has declared you justified in His sight because of the death of His holy Son on the Altar of the Cross. Therefore, we pray; as You opened the eyes of the blind beggar, open the eyes of our understanding that we may see the necessity of Your suffering.

Now that your eyes of faith have been opened that you may see the Son of God and behold His full beauty, being brought to a true understanding that He is your Lord and Savior who rescued you from the clutches of Satan, and thereby freed you from the bonds of sin, death, and hell, can you remain silent? Knowing His *purpose* was to save you from your sin, shouldn’t you be eager to bring this Good News to those who are spiritually blind, that they may see their gracious Savior? Yes, you should. Thus I implore you, be like the blind beggar who after receiving his sight followed Jesus, ***“glorifying God” (v. 43)*** that others may also see *The Christ and His Purpose for their Life*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.