

**“Salvation & Eternal Life: The Ultimate Life Purpose”**

Psalm 138:8; John 3:16 and 12:25

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Christian spirituality has been a focal point and central theme for February. We have touched on basic Christian foundations such as Identity check, purpose oriented life, church missions, spiritual enthusiasm and Jesus as the door to a new life. And a new life truly means to begin a new adventure entrusting ourselves to be in *God's life* and to realize our Christian spiritual identity. Life goes beyond being biological. Life in the Scripture is a relational, ontological and theological metaphor and it starts from the relationship with God. This morning, I invite you to revisit your relationship with God and reclaim your *Salvation and Eternal Life*.

What does it mean to you *Salvation and Eternal life*? Perhaps you think of Salvation Army. And you think of continued life after death. Why do you come to church? To seek inner peace or enjoy community fellowship? That's fine as long as you feel comfortable. But Salvation and Eternal life still matter to us because these tell us who we are as Christians and remind us how precious we are in God's eyes. Honestly, many progressive Christians including myself, haven't paid great attention to the spiritual and eternal. I want to be clear with you that salvation and eternal life doesn't merely mean a free pass ticket that you can stay and enjoy permanently on a heavenly resort after death. Eternal life means much more than the mere desire of life longevity. Rather it means security and everlasting tie in your unbreakable relationship with God. Simply speaking, the promise of salvation and eternal life gives you affirmation of faith that you are a child of God. Isn't this good news?

A couple of weeks ago, I read a book, *Eternal Life: A New Vision* written by a well-known retired Episcopal bishop, bestselling author, and biblical scholar John Shelby Spong. In this book, Bishop Spong challenges readers and Christians to go beyond religion and theism by eliminating traditional religious beliefs. That means such as heaven and hell, and eternal life. He argues that human religious thought and early Christian churches created these false, non-scientific doctrinal concepts to calm human being's anxiety and fear. He fully accepts the biology and science approach to reach the truth. He also argues for the creation of a new religious paradigm. His challenge is to replace God's image as a person with a scientific process. In his understanding, human life, God and eternal life are subjected to the power of science and each of us was merely a single cell. I am not opposing to science and its contribution, but I

don't believe that science will give us the meaning of life, a deep sense of spirituality, or any guidance to make a better relationship with God. I sense that the world and people seem to count on science as their absolute truth and people seem to recognize religious beliefs as outdated metaphors and assumptions like magic. If you believe the big bang theory as scientific truth explaining the origin of the universe, that's fine. But don't trust it as your religion. If you believe in the Big bang theory, you are a believer of materialism and life determination. Then you don't have your own free choice rather your life is pre-determined if you see your life as material. That's not what we Christians want to pursue in life. We want something meaningful to make our choices with free-will and make a difference in life. In Ancient times, humans believed that God created the universe and people called it Cosmos. But in our contemporary world, we call the universe 'space' which has no meaning. How can we possibly reclaim our Christian spiritual identity if we eliminate the notions of God or replacing the divine God with scientific processes? In this, is there hope for heaven and eternal life? How can we compromise scientific understanding with our faithful explorations? Are you seeking something meaningful or are we really just a large single cell?

Ironically, we can find a clue and an answer to these challenges in the early Church affirmation of faith, especially the Triune God in the Nicene Creed or the Apostle's Creed.<sup>1</sup> The Nicene Creed begins with defining God as the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth of all that is, seen and unseen. Second, Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from light, true God from true God. He is *begotten, not made*. Lastly, the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds, from the Father and the Son. Christianity believes in the community of God in relationships. Christianity doesn't believe in God in silence, but a dynamic, relational God. The only key word to fully grasp and experience God in Christianity is love. Therefore God is love and we are only able to grasp and experience God only in our experiences of love. All Gods' creations were created out of God's love and we human beings are the expressions of God's abundant love and overflowing joy. Therefore, I assure you that you are beautiful and special because God created you out of His love!

The first Old Testament reading reminds us that God placed His purpose in us. What is God's purpose in you? This is not a question about your wish list, but rather it is more about theological, philosophical and ethical reflection on yourself. Let me ask you this way. Do you know who you are? I am not asking about your profile or family tree, but your "authentic self" when God created

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<sup>1</sup> The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed can be found in the Hymnal page 880 and 881.

you! I call this “the ultimate and original purpose’ when God gave you a life. Is it possible to fully grasp ourselves and even ‘the ultimate purpose in us’? As we live our lives, we compare ourselves with others, judge others and in the same way, others judge us. We often forget about ourselves and stop asking questions, “Who really am I?” “Am I worthy enough?” Your close friends or family members can tell you more about you, but it is impossible to fully grasp who you really are. Christianity is a religion that God created you because God loves you. God created each of us in God’s image, but we are not merely God’s same copies. Christians believe that we are varieties of God’s creations out of abundant love and overflowing joy. Therefore every one of us is created with God’s holy and special purpose. The purpose of spiritual disciplines and faithful life are the process to understand God’s ultimate purpose in us and it is the same thing that we build our close relationship with God helping us see ourselves not from others, but from God’s eyes.

The core essence of Christianity is that Jesus Christ came to the world and died for our salvation and eternal life. Eternal life is not merely an extension of a continued biological longevity, but an expression of assurance that we will dwell in God and God in us forever. We Christians confess that Jesus, the Son of God was ‘begotten’ not made in the Nicene Creed and Apostle’s Creed. When we believe in Jesus and ‘are born again’ by the Holy Spirit, we’ll earn the status to become ‘God’s children’ as Jesus. Isn’t this incredible news? What we call ‘salvation and Eternal life’ is the result from a new relationship with God.

The third Scripture reading teaches us how spiritually to be born again. “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12:25)” Jesus wasn’t challenging us to hate our lives but to be tuned in to God’s life purpose in you. Many times we don’t see ourselves as God does. We should make intentional efforts to know God’s intentions. But what we often just see ‘shadows’ of ourselves. It is almost impossible to see ourselves without divine interventions. God created us as authentic beings. Look around! You are beautiful, perfect God’s creations! But we often fail to see our authenticity. If you love to stick to your ‘old self, you will not be able to see your authentic self as God made you. When we have faith and are spiritually born again through Christ Jesus, we will become ‘children of God’ like Jesus! Isn’t this incredible news and God’s gift and promise?

Then how do we claim that we are precious children of God and have salvation and blessing of eternal life? It is your faith! John Wesley explained that faith is ‘not an act of will’ but it is ‘assurance’. In Hebrew 11:1 the author gives us a definition of faith. “Now faith is *the assurance of things hoped for*, the conviction of things not seen.” Where do you find your true meaning of life

and the ultimate life purpose? It is your faith of assurance that you are here because God created you out of love. Do not understand your life as an accident based on biological science, but have the assurance of faith that God placed His special purpose to be you not as a copy of someone else because you are so precious in God's eyes. So find out your ultimate life purpose in your relationship with God. Then you may have eternal life. Take this for your spiritual identity. Have a faith of assurance! Amen.