

When No One is Looking



Hebrews 10:22-25

²² Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Let us hold 'UNSWERVINGLY to the HOPE WE PROFESS'.

Let us 'SPUR EACH OTHER ON to love and good deeds', that comes from that hope.

That's the aim of today's message: to spur you on to live unswervingly in professing and living according to that hope you.

When no one is looking:

- Who are you?
- What are you doing?
- What purpose are you giving your time and energy to?

Lockdowns are an unusual occurrence for us in NZ, especially in this generation. But for many, a lockdown gives us an excellent opportunity to look in the mirror:

Take away my job, my status, my activities and my social gatherings, who am I when I'm alone?

Lockdowns are very effective at peeling back the layers of external activity, and leaving us with our inner world: the private place of what we think, what we long for, what we fill ourselves up on, and what we're truly about.

For some in lockdown, you're working extra hard in an essential service, and it may feel draining. But you get home, can't go out to sports, or social gatherings, or meetings, and have time to think: *"Is this job really me? Is this it? Is this what I want to be doing? What else is there in my life that has significance or lasting value?"*

For others in lockdown, you have no work to do, may not have many or any people in your bubble, and can't connect in person with anyone or with any of the activities you usually did. You might ask:

“What can I fill up on? What can give me enough emotional pleasure or distraction that I don't have to feel lonely and insignificant?”

For some in lockdown, you may have a household bubble full of people and feel you have no room to escape to. You're overloaded by noise and people and the same faces, every day. Maybe there are times you think: *“I need space to think! I need time out. I need a break from all of this and to 'find myself'. What is my life about – what matters about my life in the scheme of things? Is this it?”*

And for many in lockdown, you may not be thinking about anything much at all – just enjoying some time out!

Whatever situation you find yourself in, take a moment today to look in the mirror of your life. When nobody's looking, who are you, what do you do, what do you think, what purpose are you living for?

Those questions may feel a little abstract or a bit daunting, but they are questions central and fundamental to what really matters in life.

Our lockdowns are a great time to check and review the activity of our life to really understand the purpose we're living towards, or maybe discover that we're not living for any particular purpose at all. Often, we drift from purposeful direction and don't notice that our life is simply filling up on 'stuff'. Some of it good, some of it unhealthy, some of it that's just filling space.

When no one's looking, when you're locked down at home where no one else can see, **who are you?**

What has significance in your life? What purpose could you point to and explain: “This is what my life is about. This is what I have given my life to.”

My hope for this message, is that you won't feel *depressed* when facing these questions, but today your life will be **REFRESHED** in purpose, hope and direction.

When it comes to purpose and identity and significance:

- Let's be **crystal clear**, not cloudy, vague, or clueless.
- Let's be **confident and enthusiastic** about what we're aiming to do and achieve, and the value of it.
- Let's be **certain** that the purposes we're living for are worthy of our time and resources.

Last Sunday I shared about the Apostle Paul's life. His identity, his purpose, his whole life was very focussed in one direction. But in one moment, in one encounter with the glorious brilliance of Jesus, he was totally turned around. So impacted by the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul went on to be one the greatest preachers and activists for Jesus Christ, who has ever lived. When looking back on his esteemed life before he met Jesus, he said:

Philippians 3

*7*But whatever was gain to me I count as loss for the sake of Christ. *8*More than that, I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

*12*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. *13*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, *14*I press on toward the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

Paul had learnt the power and requirement of FOCUS: "**One** thing I do"; "I press on toward the **goal**".

He wasn't trying to do many things – he was focussed on doing one thing. He was a man of clarity, purpose and focus.

And by the end of his life, he was able to say:

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. *8* Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day

2 Tim' 4:7-8

Like Jesus, and the Apostles, like Moses and Abraham, Paul wasn't distracted by the things of this world. He was here on mission, on purpose, and on fire!

To this, you too have been created and called.

You may remember some years ago, a short reference I made to a story on the news, about a couple of elderly women in a rest home, knitting. It seemed like a bit of a light-weight story, not particularly relevant to mainstream, busy NZ. But these 2 ladies were cheerfully knitting woollen beanies for poor people in another nation, who faced harsh winters. A very small act of kindness, but the recipients were very appreciative.

What got my attention in this story, is that these two elderly ladies had terminal cancer.

They smiled and laughed as they knitted furiously.

While their bodies were dying, they were living on purpose.

They would never meet the people they were knitting for; there wasn't a lot that their bodies could do anymore; and they didn't have much time left on earth to use. But what they did have, they chose to dedicate, focus and use to make a difference.

While physically locked down by terminal cancer, they had a purpose they couldn't be distracted from.

...Crystal clear, confident and enthusiastic. To this too, you are created and called.

Throughout the scriptures, there's a mystery about our lives, hidden in plain sight. Psalm 139 reveals that we're no accident; we have been cleverly, masterfully and purposely woven together. A marvellous Psalm about our creation, but tucked in there is a simple line that is important to highlight:

Psalm 139:15-16

My frame was not hidden from you

when I was made in the secret place,

when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book

before one of them came to be.

Specific days in history, were 'ordained' – created, chosen and set apart, for you. You're not here at this time for no purpose.

You're not insignificant in this time of history.

Instead, these days were made FOR you...

And each day of your life, has already been written into a book in heaven.

Now this doesn't mean there's a pre-destined script of what you will say and do, and when. That's to misunderstand eternity and the purposes of God.

God sees all this world's short history, from eternity.

He can see every detail, before He even created any of it.

And that's when God recorded all He would do, and all you will choose, say, and do. He has, and is recording our lives against His purposes and design.

God is not an evolutionist.

He is not waiting without structure, design or intent, to see what will randomly unfold. Instead, God is a God of meticulous detail, economy, creativity and purpose.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So, quite specifically, God has planned in advance, what He has created us for. Each day of our life is designed in advance. In God's plan, none of your days are without value or purpose. Even before you were born God: *'saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.'*

And here's where things get a bit scary.

On the final day of this world, the bible tells us that there is an accounting for our lives. People are resurrected to stand before the judge of all the earth:

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Revelation 20

So, there are books written about the purposes and plans God created for us, as well as recording in detail, *how* we lived. God is keeping an account of what we do with the days ordained for us, and the works He had planned for us.

For some, our lives will record a life lived far *removed* from God's purposes and will for us.

But for others, our lives will be read as being active and faithful in the call, Word and will of God.

Much like reading the books in the Bible about Moses and Joshua, Noah and Abraham, Peter and Paul, Ruth and Esther.

Just as their stories were written for us to read, so also YOUR LIFE IS BEING WRITTEN DOWN. ...

There are specific days and works that God has placed you on earth for.

Of these, we need to be: **crystal clear, confident and enthusiastic** in our pursuit of. To this, you are created and called.

One of the challenges we have in this modern age and in such an affluent nation, are the constant array of OPTIONS promoted to us. Most of these weren't available to previous generations.

"Click me" "Buy this" "Travel here" "Taste this" "Look like that" "Watch this" "Enjoy this other thing" "Listen here" "Read this" ...

Our attention is bombarded by opportunities to do everything and anything, other than what we are placed here to do. Being busy day by day on different things, won't result in us doing what God destined and called us to be doing.

It takes **intentional** and diligent focus; clarity and commitment.

Ephesians 5 says:

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

"Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Wow! What a very clear reminder: make the most of every opportunity; as well as the directive to understand what the Lord's will is.

We're supposed to **know** what God has called us to...

Here are some of the things that God has clearly laid out for us all, repeated throughout the Bible.

Even right from the beginning, on Day 6 of creation, God commissions us: *²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

Genesis 1:28

Again: it's not fuzzy or unclear. God communicates specifically and clearly about His purpose for us. He calls us to be fruitful and rule over all that He created on earth.

And again, through Jesus, God commissions us in Mark 16 and Matthew 28:

*¹⁵ He said to them, "Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to all creation. Mark 16:15*

*¹⁹ Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and **teaching them** to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28*

Jesus is very clear on His call to us, and His expectation of us to:

- Preach the Gospel
- Make disciples
- Baptise people
- Teach them His commands.

If you've ever thought your life is insignificant, without purpose, or lacking clear direction, THINK AGAIN!

That's not what these scriptures tell us.

YOU are the one Jesus has SENT into a broken world, to bring the Good News and REALITY of His Kingdom...

But maybe, these directives, these instructions and commands, feel a bit daunting... Maybe we feel Jesus set the bar a bit too high?

It worries me that many churches in affluent nations, often teach people to be like Jesus in **doctrine** and in **social service**... but not in His entirety, or reality of the supernatural **power** Jesus ministered in.

These things sometimes scare us, because they require supernatural ability, and counter-cultural activity. We can instead, focus our teaching and our activity on things that are good and culturally acceptable - a form of respectable religion, but lacking some of the clarity of what Jesus commanded.

'Religious enterprise often leads to our replacing what is *true*, with what is *acceptable*'.

We can live a life that is acceptable and possibly even commendable by many Christians, but one that doesn't need **faith**: focussing on the things we can do in our own strength, rather than relying upon the supernatural provision that comes from the Spirit of God.

Church, it's not only possible, but it's quite common for Christians to replace the *clarity* of what Jesus commanded and commissioned us to do, with a **safe**, culturally acceptable, **alternative**.

When no one's looking..., what about you? What is it that you're doing and pursuing? *What have you discovered about yourself in Lockdown?*

If you were to write up your own **report card** about your progress in your calling, identity, and purpose in God, what would you write?

Did you know that Jesus did exactly that for 7 different churches in the Bible?

He wrote a personalised letter to each of the churches, encouraging them in what they were doing well, correcting them in things that needed to change, and reminding them of the promise He has made to REWARD them if they are faithful in what God had called them to.

You can find their 'mid-term' report cards in Revelation chapters 2&3.

What would you write down to yourself, today, if you were to write up your own mid-term report card? Lockdown is a great opportunity to do exactly that. I challenge you: have a go! But remember:

- it has to be **encouraging** in the things you're doing well in;
- there has to be a clear **correction** in the things that need to change;
- and you need to remind yourself of the **promises** of God to you, of the **rewards** he gives for faithfulness.

When no one else is looking... God is... And a great cloud of witnesses also, are calling you on, urging you on, cheering you on to finish the unique and specific work that God put you on earth for. But it requires us to be:

Crystal clear, confident and enthusiastic in our pursuit of it.

And that requires faith.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof [assurance] of things not seen. NASB

The Amplified version translates the 'proof and assurance' of the unseen as: ***[the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses]***. AMP

So, faith is not airy-fairy; not vague; it's not theoretical.

Faith is very **solid**: it's CERTAIN of what we hope for.

Faith has full assurance, already seeing as FACT, what can't yet be seen as material.

If you're a follower of Jesus, you are CERTAIN about Him, even though you can't see Him right now. You are fully assured that everything Jesus said is true, and that your life is now hidden with Him, even though it remains unseen to the natural eyes of this age.

You understand that about Biblical faith - that's our *starting* place.

But because of that starting place, what does FAITH mean to your *daily* activity?

What unseen promise, what purpose or goal do you hope to achieve? Are we only walking in the knowledge and certainty of what we already have, or can see? Or are we pursuing the things of FAITH – things that you haven't yet reached or attained, but like the Apostle Paul said: *"one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,"*.
Philippians 3:13

Paul was fully assured, certain about what he was here for, crystal clear about what he was called to do in God, even though it wasn't yet seen or obtained.

It's easy to rest on the assurance of our faith, for *salvation*.
But Jesus has called and commissioned you for so much more!

Have a look through Hebrews chapter 11, often referred to as the chapter on faith. You'll read of all sorts of things people in history went in pursuit of, because of their faith.

Noah built an ark for a world-wide flood, even though there had never been a flood anywhere on earth up until that time. No doubt he would've looked crazy to the world around him. But he was CERTAIN and ASSURED that what God said would happen, would.
And it did.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

That is, Abraham left his property, family, and nation to go to a land God promised that his descendants were to receive many centuries later. A bit ridiculous when you consider at the time that Abraham was **old**, he had **no children**, his wife was **barren**, and these supposed, promised descendants, would only possess the Promised Land **hundreds of years after** Abraham died!

And yet, in faith, Abraham believed God, giving up everything, and made his way to a place he had never been to before. He was CERTAIN and ASSURED about his purpose in God and the promises of God.

And everyone of God's promises were fulfilled. His barren wife had a son, who went on to have a son and 12 grandsons, who became the nation of Israel that possessed the Promised Land of Canaan, and from whom the Saviour of the world came!

We read of Abraham's great grandson Joseph, who, although God had shown him that he would be a great governor on earth, saving his father's family, all in line with the promise given to Abraham, and yet: Joseph was **disconnected** from his family, **sold** into slavery in a foreign land, and then thrown in **prison**. Everything seemed to be the complete *opposite* to what God had called and destined Joseph for.

But even though Joseph was lost to his family and even to the whole world (rotting at the bottom of a jail), still, Joseph was **certain** and **sure** about who he was, and what he was on earth for. He remained faithful to his calling and faithful to God's promises.

And then, after years in slavery and prison, in one day, he is pulled out of prison, and made Prime Minister of the most powerful nation on earth! He is clear on what needs to be done: he saves millions of lives, including his whole father's family, who then go on to become the nation of Abraham's descendants who possess the promised land of Canaan. His faith in God, resulted in a daily life given to the purposes of his identity and calling. And like the Apostle Paul, Joseph finished his race; completed the works God had set out for him; and his story is written for you to read.

Hebrews 11 goes on to say:

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith,

When no one was looking, who were these people?

What were they living for and pursuing in faith, when no one was looking?

Use this lockdown period as a time to review your life and activity.

God has ordained these days for you.

He has prepared works for you to do.

He is writing down what you are doing with these days, and you will stand before Him to give an account.

Let's be:

Crystal clear, confident and enthusiastic in our pursuit of what God has created and called us for.

Your life matters! But not everything you *do* matters.

Be sure to focus your life on the things that *do* matter in eternity:

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Ephesians 5

2 Corinthians 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

This week, why don't you take time to review what your life is fixed on - make clear what God has ordained your days for.

And take some time to call people, offer them prayer, be prepared to share the hope that you have in Christ.

And let's spur one another towards the purposes and will of God.

Let's be consistent and effective, in **the basics**.

Let me pray for you from Colossians 1

I ask the Heavenly Father, for you, in the name of Jesus, that He would:

Fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[a] ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[b] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

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