

Youth in Search of a Meaningful Life

SERMON · Family, Discipleship and the Christian Life · 21 October 2018 (Youth Sunday)

Deuteronomy 11:18-19 (quoted)

Luke 2:41-52

1 John 2:15-17 (quoted)

Genesis 1:26

Psalms 19:1-2 (quoted)

Galatians 6:7

John 1:43-51

Genesis 39:1-23

Proverbs 3:5 (quoted)

Proverbs 14:12 (quoted)

Proverbs 4:7 (quoted)

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (quoted)

Today we celebrate Youth Sunday, and the theme for meditation is ‘Youth in Search of a Meaningful Life’. As I sat down to write this sermon, it occurred to me that young men and women actually have very little time in their hands to search out, find, and settle upon whatever they consider to be the components of a meaningful life. But that is true of everyone, young or old. First, our life is in God’s hands, and hangs by a thread of sovereign grace; He created human life, and He alone decides what human life is for. The old adage that ‘you have your whole life before you’ has to be understood within the limits of what God decides our ‘whole life’ shall be. Second, youth is a period in our lives that lasts little more than ten or twelve years out of a whole lifetime.

What I am trying to say here is that parents should recognise this limitation of time, and should begin early to mould their children into responsible Christian youth, and later, adults. We read in Deuteronomy 11:18-19: “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” While we know little of the younger days of our Lord Jesus Christ, we know that His earthly parents brought Him up in exactly this manner. The narrative in Luke 2:41-52 tells us how Jesus was found missing from the group, and how Mary and Joseph found the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. The conversation that followed, between Mary and Jesus, showed that He was already mindful of His relationship with God the Father, and conscious of the purpose assigned to His life by His heavenly Father: that His life was a march towards the Cross, for the redemption of His people. And yet He returned with them to Nazareth, and passed through the ordinary stages of growing up. Jesus grew in wisdom, that is, intellectually; He grew in stature, that is, physically; He grew in favour with God, that is, spiritually; and He grew in favour with men, that is, socially.

We return, then, to the question: what is a successful and meaningful life? Where do we find answers that carry real weight for whether our life is, in the end, successful and meaningful? The true Christian source is the Holy Bible. But the proliferation of technology, media, and easy access to information bombards our young people with a world of philosophy that may lead them astray.

The world tells young men and women, passionately and persuasively, that human beings are simply a highly evolved species that came into being for no discernible reason. Since there is no discernible reason for our existence, on this view, there is no objective morality to which we are all accountable; morality, the very idea of right and wrong, becomes subjective, defined by each individual person, or by each culture. Since morality is treated as personal, each person is left free, to a great extent, to define what they believe to be right and wrong, and to slip into a morality built around maximising comfort and pleasure. On these standards, then, the basis for determining what makes a life meaningful becomes highly individualistic, or entirely dependent on a given society or culture.

Christians are warned against exactly this. In 1 John 2:15-17 we are told: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” Christianity, in embracing the Holy Bible as the inerrant word of God, establishes the doctrines of Scripture as the axiomatic, or self-evident, basis of moral and spiritual absolutes. That is where the basis for a meaningful life should come from.

God tells us that men and women are not a highly evolved species, but His special creation, made in His own image (Genesis 1:26). Men and women were intentionally created by God to bring Him glory; and not only humanity, but the whole of creation, is meant to glorify God. David recognised this when he sang, in Psalm 19:1-2: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” To those with ears to hear, this chorus of praise to God is being sung constantly; the universe is like one great choir, forever producing achingly beautiful melodies, and soaring crescendos of joy, to its Creator. The primary purpose of life is not to maximise personal pleasure, but to serve the Creator; pleasures are wonderful things, so long as they are first filtered through love for God and love for others (Luke 10:27).

To the youth, let me ask: how good are your decision-making skills? Have you ever wondered, ‘What if I had...?’ — especially when the outcome was not what you had expected? You may never have realised that the Bible is, among other things, a book about making wise decisions; it is filled with examples of good and bad decisions, and their outcomes. It shows us that good decisions, based on the right principles, lead to good results, while decisions made on the basis of anger, lust, and selfishness should be expected to yield poor ones. The Bible reveals a principle that runs through many areas of life: we reap whatever we sow (Galatians 6:7). Sometimes the connection is not immediately obvious, but as we grow older, the results of our decisions become clearer. If you look at the Bible as a textbook on decision-making, you will find a great deal of help in it; if you want to make the right choices, you can spare yourself a good deal of trouble by looking closely at the examples recorded for us in God’s word. Learning to put God first turns us away from the self-first, egocentric approach that ultimately leads only to frustration and unhappiness.

Put Jesus before this world. The Gospel passage from John 1:43-51, and the passage from Genesis 39 read to us today, both show what infallible obedience to God looks like. In the first, Philip, and others after him, dropped everything they were doing and followed Jesus the moment they received His call; so it was, too, with Peter, James, Matthew, and the rest, some young and some older. This action of theirs, even though they did not yet understand what lay ahead of them, in time gave their lives their true purpose: proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of Jesus. The passage from Genesis shows us how Joseph held fast to his principles, and did not give way to temptation. Younger people, and older people too, for that matter, face more temptations than they can count, at every step they take in life; these are to be fought with prayer and supplication, always relying on the Holy Spirit, rather than on our own wisdom.

Do not forget that we exist for a purpose. God created us with the potential, one day, to become citizens of His Kingdom. Learning to make wise decisions on the basis of God’s instruction is one of the first lessons every one of us, and especially our growing children and young people, needs to learn. God tells us not to rely on our ‘own understanding’: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5); “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). How, then, do we learn to make wise decisions? The key to right decisions is to seek wisdom; making the right choices becomes far easier once we do. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get

understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). We are overwhelmed by the options and opportunities that our own time sets before us, yet our core values need not change. Learning to show due respect for God as Creator of all things is fundamental to a meaningful life. Read the wisdom of the book of Proverbs, and make it your daily quest to seek understanding and knowledge, and to apply them to your decisions. After a blessed and comfortable life, in which Solomon was free to experiment with every kind of pleasure and project, he summed up all that he had learned. His conclusion, drawn from a lifetime of experimenting, was this: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Let us pray.

God of life, we thank You for the creativity and vibrancy with which You enrich young people. We thank You that Your Son, Jesus Christ, as a young person, surrendered His life to Your will, that the whole world might find the newness of life. We pray for wisdom and understanding, strength and power, visions and dreams, to create a world of justice, equality, and peace, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.