

## "Purpose"

<b><u>Occasion</u></b>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<b><u>Day, Date &amp; Time</u></b>	Sunday 7 September 2003 at 18:30
<b><u>Basis</u></b>	Mark 6:7-29
<b><u>Reading</u></b>	Mark 6:7-30
<b><u>Hymns</u></b>	51, 624 from Mission Praise
<b><u>Songs</u></b>	181, 32, 743, 49, from Mission Praise 265, 256 from the Source
<b><u>Author/Speaker</u></b>	Paul Rydon

---

Do you have a purpose in your life?  
And if so what is it?

I'm not referring to short-term goals,  
or even mid-term aims like:  
Where shall I work?  
What diet shall I go on?  
Whom shall I marry?  
Shall we have kids?  
How can I support my family?  
Where shall I live? - nor even:  
What church shall I attend?

These things,  
or rather the answers to these questions,  
though life-changing in themselves,  
are plans,  
rather than purposes.

Purposes are more like:  
"I intend to make enough money so that I can retire when I'm forty-five";  
"I want to have lots of kids and bring them up as evangelists and  
convert the whole of Royston and all its surrounding villages to  
Christianity";  
Or a longer term purpose might be (for a Christian)  
"to serve God and his church all my life and spend eternity with Christ"; or  
"I want to devote myself to bringing Christian values into secular society".

The question is:  
How are you going to use the life that God has given to you?



*Purpose*

What more do we need to enjoy an enriched life  
in harmonious relationship with our God.

But part of the reason we can do that  
is that we can and should have a real purpose to our lives.  
And that purpose should be to achieve the purpose that God chose us to fulfil.

When the great apostle Paul preached in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, ([Acts 13:36](#))  
he said that David (King David in the Old Testament) served God's purpose  
in his generation;  
and the song we sang a few minutes ago picked up that idea:  
"I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation ...."

Is that our aim too?

-----

I want to look at the events recorded in our portion of Mark's Gospel this evening in  
this context.

The primary characters here are Jesus,  
his disciples  
and John the Baptist.  
The secondary characters are King Herod,  
Herodias  
and her daughter.

Whether we have the time to discuss them all remains to be seen.

Jesus was a man with a purpose.  
Wherever we look in the gospels  
we are repeatedly reminded that he was a man with a mission.

We could of course go back to Genesis and the fall of man  
and look for the origins of this mission,  
and then all the prophesies of the Old Testament  
that remind us  
that God is still intent on fulfilling his purposes through Christ,  
but for tonight we will start at his birth.

Look at what the Angel Gabriel said to Mary. Read [Luke 1:30-33](#).  
Here we see clearly stated the purpose that Jesus would fulfil  
and *that* purpose coloured every aspect of his life on Earth.

Look at what the Angel said to Joseph. Read [Matthew 1:20b-21](#).

And then as a boy of twelve:  
"Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business ([Luke 2:49 - kjv](#))

And then throughout his public ministry:  
"I have come to seek and to save that which was lost";

*Purpose*

“I come, not to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners”;  
He consistently maintains that he is on this earth  
to fulfil the purposes of his Father in Heaven.

And then as he died on the cross,  
he cries out for all to here, “It is finished”,  
for he had fulfilled the earthly part of his purpose.

Here in Mark,  
we see Jesus,  
full of life, fulfilling that purpose.  
We have watched him heal the man with the withered hand,  
defying and challenging the man-made protocol of his day  
and displaying a God who is not a God of the rule-book,  
but a God of compassion,  
mercy  
and justice.

We have seen him heal the woman  
and bring Jairus’s daughter back to life,  
demonstrating the power of God over sickness and over death.

We have seen him teach the people,  
feed them in a miraculous way,  
and confront the hypocrisy of the religious leaders.

We have seen him befriend those at the lower end of society,  
forgive their sins  
and turn their lives around.

We have watched him cast out demons with the authority of the Son of God.

When John the Baptist was thrown into prison, he sends his disciples to ask whether  
He is the One,

and Jesus sends the message back:  
“The blind receive their sight,  
the lame walk,  
the lepers are cleansed,  
the deaf hear,  
the dead are raised,  
and the good news is preached to the poor”

And now he sends out his disciples to fulfil their purpose too.

I wonder whether, when they first answered Jesus’ call to “follow me”  
they knew what they had taken on.

When Allon Taffs asked me if I would be willing to become an elder of this church  
back in 1970,

and Ruth and I prayed over it,  
we had no idea what such a commitment would entail.  
But we accepted the role as part of God’s purpose for our lives.

*Purpose*

And as I watch Jesus' disciples struggle to come to terms with what Jesus required of them,

it is clear that they were frequently taken by surprise  
and often dismay  
as the purposes of God unravelled before their very eyes  
and what Jesus expected of them.

But God had an amazing plan for them too,  
as they followed the teachings of the Master  
and learned from him.

Jesus had been going round some of the villages preaching and teaching the people  
and now it was their turn.

So he sends them out in pairs,  
to preach in the villages too,  
and to help them he gives them authority over evil spirits.  
But they were also to go in faith.

With nothing but the clothes they stood up in,  
sandals on their feet  
and a staff in their hand  
they headed off to the villages on their first evangelistic mission.

Jesus was training them for the work ahead  
after he was gone  
and the lessons they learned here would be invaluable then.  
And as they went their way,  
they cast out demons  
and healed the sick  
and preached the word to all who would accept them.

We cannot pass this by  
without at least commenting on the use and bestowing of miraculous gifts  
today.

As we have been seeking a pastor,  
their seem to be two distinct views on this question.

One side says that they were given only for the apostolic age  
and were then withdrawn,  
and the other says that they are just as valid today as they were then  
and that we should all expect to see them used.

But as I read my Bible, and see how these gifts are used,  
and then read what God does in his church in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century,  
I see a less black and white picture.

If you read the story of Jackie Pullinger  
and her work with the drug addicts of Hong Kong,  
clearly a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was used by God  
to help each man to overcome the addiction,  
often without the terrible pain that withdrawal entails.

*Purpose*

And from what I have heard of today's Teen Challenge ministry,  
I believe that similar gifts are given by God for this special situation.

And so I conclude that God will always empower his work  
in whatever age it occurs and in whatever society  
to meet the needs of his people  
and those that he is drawing to faith.

Quite clearly this was what was needed at the time to fulfil God's purpose  
and we can expect to be empowered by God,  
not necessarily or commonly in a spectacular way,  
but sufficient to fulfil his purpose at the time.

So it was here.

They came back and reported to Jesus all that they had done and taught.

Such was the impact of their ministry that King Herod heard about Jesus.  
Who was this man, he wondered,  
who could perform such miracles  
and even enable his disciples to do them as well.  
You see Herod had a guilty conscience.

Everyone speculated as to who Jesus was.

But to Herod,  
he could be no other than a reincarnated John the Baptist  
because he had had him beheaded.

And so we get this insertion as to how John came to lose his head.

But I want to take the opportunity to look at what John's purpose was.

We have to go to Luke's gospel to find the answer.

Read [Luke 1:16-17](#).

This was the purpose of John the Baptist's life,  
and we see it fulfilled as he preaches in the wilderness,  
preparing the people for the emergence of Jesus  
and baptising them for repentance of sin.  
And as we know,  
he baptised Jesus too.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets  
and, like them, he not only preached righteousness and repentance,  
but also denounced wickedness and sin,  
and in the case of Herod and Herodias,  
this resulted in him being thrown into jail.

The history of the Herods is too complex to go into here,  
but Herod had seduced Herodias from his brother Philip.

*Purpose*

So we have here a double adultery,  
for both their spouses were still alive;  
and to make matters worse, she was also niece to both of them  
which according to Leviticus 20 was a forbidden relationship,  
as was marrying the wife of your brother.  
According to Jewish law they should both have been excommunicated  
and put to death.

Yet Herod respected John,  
for he knew him to be a righteous man.  
But he had not bargained for the grudge and spitefulness of Herodias.  
Taking advantage of this stupid King's drunken oath to her tantalising daughter,  
she claimed John's head,  
and Herod,  
to his eternal shame and guilt,  
complied.

Yet John had fulfilled his calling.  
He had prepared a people for their Messiah,  
he had preached repentance  
and spoken out against gross sin even in the highest place of society.  
But for this he lost his life on this earth  
to gain another in a higher realm.

Jesus says of John,  
that there was none greater born of women than John the Baptist.

As to Herod's purpose,  
it seems to have been preservation of his own skin,  
a lust and pursuit of power  
and the lure of another man's wife,  
forbidden by the law of God.

Herodias on her part seems to have been driven by revenge  
even to the point of using her daughter's gift  
as a means of fulfilling her evil and treacherous desires.

One wonders what sort of a woman,  
her daughter would become.

-----

When annual appraisals were first introduced into the work place,  
one of the questions every boss had to ask his staff was,  
"What do you hope to be doing in five years time".

Stock answers in those days of secure employment would be  
"Doing *your* job" or  
"My ambition is to become Managing Director".  
Others more cynically would say "Miles away from here"

*Purpose*

Facile though we may have thought the question to be,  
it was designed to focus the mind on career development  
and to inspire performance,  
by giving direction and purpose to every day.

And so it is with us.

The Bible says ([Colossians 1:16](#)) that all things were made by God and for God,  
and that includes you and me.

So why are we here  
and what are we going to do with the rest of our lives?

We know what God *requires* of us:  
“to act justly,  
to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God”. ([Micah 6:8](#))  
But some of us are called to greater service and commitment.

Clearly *our* purpose is to fulfil *God's* purpose in our lives  
and to live that purpose out day by day and year by year.  
If we know why we are here  
we shall order our lives to live according to our purpose.

My challenge to you tonight is not to burden you with guilt  
nor to demand that you give more of your time to God  
or to this church.

So many churches lay enormous burdens on their people,  
which God does not do.

Christianity sets you free  
and should relieve you  
and empower you  
to live for God in a free and spontaneous way.

May you find your true purpose in life  
and live for Jesus  
from now until the very end of eternity

Amen

Paul Rydon  
7 September 2003