

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, February 11, 2021

# *Our Purpose*

*Question 1: What is the chief end of man?*

*Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*

– The Westminster Shorter Catechism

The Westminster Catechism of the Presbyterian Church begins with a wonderful affirmation of our highest purpose in this life. It starts with *the* great question of life, and then it answers it plainly and powerfully, and all this in just a few words. The religious language of the article may require a little explaining. To glorify means to praise, honor and walk in a loving, living relationship with God. This is accomplished through an individual's life of devotion and service, but even more through their being a part of that tightly knit family of faith, the Church. And as life is lived with this focus there comes joy and fullness. Those Presbyterian theologians may be a dry and stodgy bunch, (I'll take the Heidelberg Catechism any day) but they sure nailed it on this first question! This is what life is meant to be.

The challenge with such affirmations of great and grand purpose is to reconcile that great goal and priority to the numerous matters which make up our lives. How are we to conduct and prioritize our church involvements, family life, work, finances, hobbies, etc. in a way which keeps the great focus upon our walk with God? This is one of the great challenges of the life of faith, and I find the beginning of the year and these winter months to be a great opportunity to take a little time and to re-evaluate our lives. Some are quick to dismiss this pursuit of a greater harmony with our great life purpose as an impossible venture, but you may be surprised at how God gladly guides us toward a fuller understanding of the focused life. For just a week try asking yourself throughout the day, "Lord, how can I give you glory in this endeavor?" You will be pleased with the results!

This first question of the catechism is a timely one, for as it speaks an eternal truth it is *always* applicable to the present, and because we are now being accosted by those who are zealously advancing a very different purpose for the human race. Daily we are hearing from those who are convinced that the chief purpose of our human race is absolute physical health and preservation, especially in the face of the COVID threat. Over the past year we have heard good and appropriate calls for caution and prevention: masks, distancing, clean hands and getting the vaccine as soon as possible. This is good, for the virus is still on the loose and we have yet to bring it under control. One could even say that such responsible behaviors glorify God. But

this legitimate concern is turning to an unhealthy obsession in recent times, for while great hope is on the horizon with this very effective vaccine, there are a host of experts who actively deny hope and promote fear.

Even though we are months away from a 95% effective vaccine being administered to our nation, many experts are telling us that masks are here to stay and that we shall be distancing for the next two to three years. Travel, social gatherings and restaurants will not be safe for another three years. We are also being told to fear various and exotic kinds of COVID transmission which have not even been proven, but are viewed as possibilities by some epidemiologist, and therefore must be taken as real threats. (If you think I am making this up or exaggerating, try reading the latest reports from CNN.) There is a faction whose only and highest goal is to remove all possibility of COVID transmission, even though this may mean destroying countless livelihoods, multiplying mental health and addiction problems, grossly handicapping the Church in its service and fellowship, and causing incalculable disruption to society.

It is a reasonable assumption that our vulnerable and senior populations will soon be inoculated and we will soon turn the corner in this campaign. A return to normal living and social exchange should be near. As for COVID's complete elimination, we must remember that germs have a way of surviving. Tuberculosis is still with us, but we have not let its continued existence put us into a panic. My heartfelt prayer is that God will grant us wisdom and perspective as we move out of this pandemic. May we follow the statistics and may we make the difficult decisions of when the mask should come off and when we can again be near one another, and may all this be done in faith and not in fear.

Let us keep a godly perspective. Physical health is important, but it is not the one and only life priority. (If it were, we would all give up riding in cars.) May we keep the big picture perspective of how we can, first and foremost, honor and serve God. This is the path of life and joy.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*O Holy Spirit, give me faith that will protect me from despair, from passions, and from vice; give me such love for God and men as will blot out all hatred and bitterness; give me the hope that will deliver me from fear and faint-heartedness. —Dietrich Bonhoeffer*