

WCCC2013

Follow Fearfully In the Eternal Purpose of God 1

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I have been asked to share this afternoon and if God willing, to share again tomorrow afternoon on this matter of pursuing the eternal purpose of God. We want to turn to two passages.

Ephesians 3: 8 – 13 where we find this phrase ‘the eternal purpose’.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which ^{He} carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.

Hebrews 3: 12 – 15 where we find the theme for this conference ‘as long as it is called today’.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today”, so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.”

Our Father, we come to Thee this afternoon session in the name of Your Son. We thank You for the richness and the fellowship of Your word this week. We are filled full with the truth. How can we take in more? But when we sense the presence of Jesus, our hunger is aroused again.

And so we pressed on by faith to these words of exhortation before us. We need Your strength for our spirit, soul and body. We need Your strength to speak, to translate and to receive in our hearts the word from heaven by faith. We cast ourselves upon You, O Lord. You are our confidence and our hope. And we pray in Jesus precious name. Amen.

As Christians we live in two time trains, eternity and today. And the verse says ‘as long as it is called today’ because today will soon be swallowed up in eternity. ‘As long as it is called today’ refers to the time right at this moment today. Are you living today? I know your body is here, but are you here? The verse said, ‘Today if you will hear His voice’. So for today, some will hear His voice, but for others they are thinking about yesterday or tomorrow. We want to understand how eternity can come into today because as Christians we live in eternity as well as today.

Eternal purpose of God

In the Book of Ephesians you see this phrase ‘eternal purpose’. Do you know what that means? God has an eternal plan. God is eternal. He already had a plan before everything, before creation, before man. This plan was devised before the foundation of the world. It is unstoppable. It is undeniable. And it is not subject to today. It is an eternal plan.

What is in the heart of this eternal plan? If you look at Ephesians 3:11, we see not only this phrase ‘eternal purpose’ but we also see what is at the heart of this eternal purpose because it said, ‘this was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord’. It not only had an eternal purpose, but He already had in mind Who will fulfill this eternal purpose. It was purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord. What was the plan? God wants to glorify His Son in eternity. He wants to make Him the center of everything. He wants to make all things subject under Him. This was the heart of our Father’s eternal plan. But it has another side because God is a God of love. And He wants the Son He loves to have fellowship with many sons together forever. His infinite love pours on His infinite Son; the infinite Son loving all these sons, and the Father loving all these sons. What a wonderful plan.

What is “Today”

So who needs today? It is already done. The plan is undeniable. Up in heaven they are already saying the kingdom of this earth has become the kingdom of our God and of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Now with this eternal plan in mind, why wait for today? It is because in today, the

manifold wisdom of God is displayed. In the heavenlies the powers and authorities are wondering about a great mystery. How can God ever make those rebels into lovers? How can those fickle people on earth ever become steadfast in their love? How can these flawed and fallen men ever become sons? The angels are all wondering in heaven.

Meanwhile here we are in today. Today is actually a time frame of the kingdom. It is when we live in today under the king that we are truly living. But when we look at today, when we look at the exhortation in Hebrews, today seems very iffy. Today if you will hear my voice; today do not be deceived by sins; today do not let your heart get hardened. Today hold fast; today enter in. And as we hear as long as it is called today, we realize even more how short this iffy time. What can God do with all these iffy people? What can He do in these last moments? Where do we live today? Do you realize that God has this great eternal purpose? Do you realize that we are living at the end of the day called 'as long as it is called today'? Do you really know that? If you do, then it means you and I are stuck. We are stuck between today and eternity. The reference in Hebrews chapter 3 is that the children of Israel were stuck at Kadesh-barnea. They were out of Egypt. But they were not in the Promised Land. They were stuck. They looked across the river and they could see a little of the Promised Land. And the spies brought back some wonderful grapes. God said, today if you hear my voice, enter in. But they stood by the river, and said, 'no, we cannot go in; there are giants and we are just little grasshoppers. We cannot go in'. Then God said, 'time is up. You will never enter My rest'. And they missed the day.

Some of you looked surprised at what I just said. If you turn to Hebrews 4:1-2, the writer made the spiritual applications of it for us today. *'Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.'* They missed today. But did they miss it? For forty years they lived in as long as it is called today until they heard the word again, and a new generation, forty years later, entered into the Promised Land.

When you are standing by the river and are stuck, how does God react? He speaks His prophetic word. He gives you a vision of Himself.

Stuck and Vision

Now we had some wonderful messages these few days given by our brothers. Now all of these moments in the bible when a vision came to this people, they were stuck. Isaiah was stuck without a king. What was I going to do now? There was no king. This kingdom was no good without a king. What was I going to do? Isaiah was stuck until He looked up. You remember there was a great vision that came to young Zechariah with the remnant. You remember the vision He saw of the lampstand. The children of Israel were stuck. The remnant was stuck. They came back from Babylon to Jerusalem. Hurrah! They built the altar. Hurrah! They built the foundation. Hurrah! Then the enemy said, 'stop', and they stopped. They were then stuck half way home. They could not go back and they could not go forward. Then God showed them.

There is no greater part of the history of the children of Israel than when they were stuck at the time when Jesus came. Did you ever see the people of God so stuck? They had all the outward form but none of the reality. They had a kingdom but it was actually a province of the Roman Empire. They had king Herod, but he was not an Israelite and he was not really a true king. They had the house of God but it had become a den of thieves. They were stuck. There were some people waiting for the consolation of Israel. They were waiting for the Messiah to come. It was their only hope. They waited for a long time until Jesus came. And then there was the revelation in the last book of the bible. The churches were stuck. And John was stuck. He was on the island of Patmos. What could he do? All of his fellow workers, the disciples, had been martyred. There the churches were stuck, declining in love, declining in light.

Now my point is this and I want to be practical. If we are living in this time frame of as long as it is called today, I am suggesting you and I are stuck. I do not know if you are willing to admit. No one likes to be stuck. When a fly gets stuck on the fly paper, he works a lot harder. But nothing happens. Well here we are at WCCC and we are stuck. How many of you have been to more than twenty WCCC? How many of you are here for the first time? Maybe for the first timers, you are not stuck at WCCC. But for those who have been buzzing around at WCCC, they are stuck. I came here the first time in 1986. Back in those days they threw me in the lion den like Daniel to see whether I could come out alive. I did not know a lot of these things that we have been talking about the first time I came to WCCC. Probably most of you know that I

began my days as a pastor of a denominational church. I preached the gospel when I taught the word. But I had never been taken to eternal purpose mountain. I did not know vision mountain. I did not know the Christ mountain. Never been to Parousia mountain (the coming of the Lord again mountain, in translation). At WCCC we have been soldiering around these mountains for years. But the first time I came, I had never seen such wonderful things before. So for those circling these mountains the first time, may the Lord give you the blessing of opening your eyes to see these wonderful things.

Now these things are wonderful to see. But with regards to these matters – eternal purpose, visions, sometimes as we gain more and more knowledge about them, we see them less and less. Maybe we have been soldiering among these mountains long enough. You know God said to Moses you have been circling this mountain long enough, let us go. But a lot of times we get stuck. And then instead of becoming teachers of these things, we have the need to hear it again one more time. Knowledge has a funny way of blinding us to the reality of what we know. Maybe you are one of God's servant and you are stuck. Sometimes I picture myself as one of God's servants. And the picture will be that of a donkey that Jesus sat upon on the way to Jerusalem. You know that donkey led a pretty lousy life. He knows he is a beast of burden. But he was tied all of his life to some doorpost. It is nothing more miserable than to be a servant of God and got tied to the doorpost of your church. And the servant of God can get stuck. He got nothing else to say from God and now he speaks from his file notes. I always wonder at those people who speak from their iPads. Maybe they are becoming stale.

Are we speaking the Lord's words or our words? And some of us have taken the saints just as far as we can go and do not know what to do. Are you stuck? Servants of God, are you willing to admit that? Well, I need not go into the subject of our personal Christian life; they get stuck. The devotional life is as dry as dust; feeling prisoners of circumstance; spiritual condition in intensive care unit. Many people hide the fact that their personal and spiritual lives are disasters. They just do not know what else to do. They follow one leader and then another. And then with another leader who sing cool rock and roll music in the background. But he knows something is not right.

And how about our assemblies; are we stuck? Are we doing the same thing over and over but feel like we are falling behind and not moving forward? When did His assembly become our assembly? When did His ministry become our ministry? You remember the story where Israel

had to contend with the Philistines and Goliath came up every day and challenged somebody to a dual? Every day the army got dressed up in their armor and they blew their trumpets and raised up their flags and said Halleluiah. Then Goliath appeared and they all ran away. Are we stuck? I just want us to be honest about it. Actually it may be good news. It is only when you get stuck, then you get desperate and only when you get desperate, then you hear the Lord. And when you hear the Lord, something might happen. As long as it is called today, God has something to say to us. Have you been listening these days?

The Book of Ephesians

My responsibility is to speak on the eternal purpose of God here in the Book of Ephesians. And as long as it is called today, even if you are stuck, it may be just for you. But I first want you to respect the depth of Ephesians and the spiritual life that is told us in this letter. Maybe some of you say that apart from the Gospel of John, Ephesians is the second most favorite book. It has all these wonderful truths in it; the eternal purpose of God, living in the heavenly, stewards of the mystery, the unsearchable richness of Christ, the manifold wisdom of God, filled with all the fullness of God, the dispensation unto the fullness of time, the Christ. These are all wonderful things. But I wonder if we just know too much of the knowledge of it and not the reality of it. I think it is just like the Book of Revelation, it can only be understood in its fullness with spiritual maturity. To study a book in the bible without any spiritual development is really to not understanding the word of God.

At the very beginning of the Book of Revelation, it said it was written to the bond servants. The bond servants are those who really listen and obey the word of God. You can read the Book of Revelation whether you are a Christian or not. And some people in this world are making movies out of the Book of Revelation. They have no idea of what was going on. We can read; we can have knowledge but do we have understanding.

When I was in school training for the seminary, I took a course of the doctorate seminar in the Book of Revelation. I was not a doctoral candidate but the professor let me join the seminar. Then I got books that I had to read for the seminar. I opened it up. There were English words there, but there were also a lot of Hebrew, a lot of German and a lot of Latin. Now, to get a

doctor's degree in seminary, you have to know German, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. I read that book. But did I understand it.

We have this wonderful letter of Ephesians before us. It marked the summation of the revelation of Jesus Christ that Paul had gained through the years of his life in the Lord. Now it is true that when Paul was saved, he saw the heavenly vision. But for the rest of his life, the heavenly vision was translated into his calling. Christ became his calling; Christ became his message; Christ became his life; Christ became his pursuit. And he was writing there in jail, writing from the heavenly perspective. I am glad you all read the book of Ephesians, but it is time for us to appreciate that what Paul wrote came from a heavenly vision. We might rightly ask the question: was Paul living in eternity or was He living in today when He wrote this letter? When we look at this letter to the Ephesians or Colossians or Philippians, we see some wonderfully high ground. I think sometimes we and our hunger for knowledge have run into things that we yet have to experience. Now when Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, we see that something is different. When we read Romans or Corinthians we can appreciate Paul explaining the doctrine of Jesus Christ. But when we open the letter of Ephesians, there is a torrent of living water flowing down from heaven upon us. When we see the sentence structure in Ephesians, we realize how much Paul was soaring in heaven.

Just as an example, in Ephesians 1: 3 – 13, it is all one sentence. He just flew from one great reality to another reality. He could not stop. He just kept putting comments. Paul had come to a fullness of understanding that brought him heavenward no matter what he touched. Paul just started with simple lessons. Suddenly he was talking about all these spiritual blessings in the heavens and suddenly Paul was up in the heavenlies, disclosing the mystery from the beginning of ages. No matter what he said, he rose in glory. He was soaring so high that he said wait, I better pray so the saints can catch up. Then in chapter 2 he started, 'we are dead in our trespasses and sins'. But then there he went again. And then within a few verses, he got to sit with Christ in the heavenly places. No matter where he started, he rose in his understanding. When he touched marriage, he brought it into Christ and the church. This is an amazing book. Right in the middle of it, he had this eternal purpose.

Today is the Day of Our Salvation

Since it is right in the middle, I will like to take it backwards and then tomorrow we will go forward. Because in this eternal purpose, in this process of the cross, the manifold wisdom of God you see is working out in today. First, it is the wisdom of the cross that brings us into today. And then looking forward, it is the manifold of the wisdom of the cross that brings the eternal purpose in us. So let us just deal with today.

Today is the day of our salvation. If you do not know Jesus Christ and you are not saved, you are not living in today. By the grace of God we have been brought into today. The world rulers never understood God's plan and cross or else they would not crucify him on the cross. Satan never understood the wisdom of the cross or he would never put Jesus to death. Now because of what Jesus did on the cross, the manifold wisdom of Jesus is seen in us because we can live today by the grace of God. When was your today? When was the mystery of Christ revealed to you? When did you see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? That was your today. I am so glad I live today by the grace of God. I was dead in my sin. And the Lord saved me and now I live today.

Now Paul took the Ephesians back to the day when they were saved. The new life of Christ in us is expressed in three things – faith, hope and love. You will find in many of Paul's epistle the mention of this basic life in faith, hope and love. Now Paul spent a long time talking about God's love for us in Jesus and when we are saved, we realized how wonderful this love of God is. You know Ephesians 1:4 'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love'. And of course love was the word that he chose to use for the word grace here in Ephesians. His grace has been lavished upon us. By faith you have been saved through grace. And He chose at the very beginning that when we were saved by grace we already had a part in the eternal purpose of God. From the moment we got saved, we already had a job in heaven.

What is your job? Are you still going to play piano in heaven? Is your job the one that Ephesians 2:7 said 'so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus'? Up in heaven, there is a trophy room. Jesus has won many trophies. They are all up there in display. We all are His trophies. Whenever an angel has a rough day, he just goes into this room and looks at these trophies and said, 'Oh, God's love'. Already you got a job forever. The angels just look at you and said, 'boy, what God did to change such a sinner'.

Now the brothers and sisters in Ephesus knew of this grace and love and it was said of them that they have lost their first love in them. That is the life of love. This is our new life; a life of faith. Do you believe it? We asked God to forgive our sins and all of a sudden our burdens are lifted up. We sensed the power of God and we find out in Ephesians that we are dead but He quickened us. How much power does it take to quicken a dead man? Oh this great power of God and then to reconcile us to God. We live by faith and we see by faith the victory in Jesus. You know in Ephesus, the brothers and sisters faced a lot of spiritual conflicts in the early days when they were Christians according to Acts 19. There were people who were demon possessed. There were people who were involved in witchcraft. The brothers and sisters knew they were not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of the world rulers of this darkness. Now for us it might be some kind of category of angelic beings, but in Ephesus they knew the principality was Artemus. Behind the statue of Artemus in the temple, there was the principality putting that whole city in a spiritual bondage. And they saw by faith the victory over spiritual power.

Christ is All and in All

And then suddenly living in today, there is a blessed hope in it. In Ephesians 2:12, at the end of this verse, it said the Gentile 'having no hope and without God in this world'. At that time there was no hope, no God but today Abba Father. In Colossians 1:27, it said '.... the mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory'. From the very beginning of today they had faith, hope and love. But immediately a work began to bring all of these things and all of their life before the Lord Himself. So when Paul heard of their faith, hope and love, he prayed that they might have the wisdom and knowledge in Jesus Christ. In their services, in their worship, in their seeking, a focus was needed in the Christian life. It is not enough to know that you are saved but you have to know the savior. It is not enough to know you are forgiven but you have to know the forgiver. So Paul prayed that their eyes could be opened so that they could begin to see all things are in Christ. They were led by the Holy Spirit to see Christ as their beginning and their end. Paul asked, 'do you know your calling?' Everything is all wrapped up in the hope of His calling. And so Paul prayed that they could begin to see Christ in everything.

I look in the hymn book but I do not see the hymn 'Himself'. 'Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord'. And until it happens we have a lot of components in our Christian life, but they all seem separate inside. Now by the Spirit, we can begin to see that all things are together in Christ. 'All in all forever, Jesus will I see, Jesus is everything'. Now the Spirit is working us toward an understanding of this eternal purpose. We are beginning to see that Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption. But at the same time, with our focus being centralized on Jesus Christ, another work has begun inside us. We are trying to balance all those components of our Christian life by our own strength. And they begin to make us stuck. Our depots are going bad. Somebody tells us; pray more, do more. Then we are serving God till we are exhausted. As long as it called today, we serve him more. All of these such as my position as the Sunday school superintendent in the church are causing me such problems. We have followed the leader and he has taken us so far. But now he said I do not know what to do. At the same time we are seeing that Christ is everything; we are seeing we are nothing. And if we see that, we realize we are stuck.

Now you do not know you are stuck unless you really try. Now we are not talking about those people who said they never do anything. They said Christ does everything and we never do anything. You do not know what it means to get stuck unless you really try. When we try really hard, it is the law working in us saying we can do it. We are coming to the end of the railroad track but I can do it. We know everything externally, but internally we do not know what we know. We are just like the children of Israel at the river, stuck. And when you are there, you are very close to the eternal purpose. Now the author of the Book of Hebrew did not use the word eternal purpose, but he defined the eternal purpose and what is that? It is rest. We were so close. There was the rest over the river. We did not cross the river but we could see it. Being stuck is good news. Now we are so very near, just stay with me for a couple of minutes and see whether we can get across the river.

Only God Can Fulfill His Purpose

First thing we have to realize is that the Holy Spirit has been engineering our being stuck. We tried so hard. Only God can fulfill His purpose but we want to fulfill it. Go ahead, build a bridge to get across it or ride a donkey across it. But it will not work. The Holy Spirit has

brought us into circumstances that got us stuck. And we are stuck, waiting for God to come and meet us. Now we are stuck because something else has to die. We just have not let go of it yet. But something has to die.

So Jacob was stuck. And what did he do when he got stuck. He moved. Jacob was stuck with his brother who promised to kill him, so Jacob decided to leave town. Then he got stuck with Laban and he had to leave town. Then he got stuck in Shechem and he had to get out of town. And only when he got back to Bethel, then he got rest. Bethel means the house of God. Jacob did not find rest until he got back to Bethel. He got back there and saw the Lord at Bethel. And he called the place El-bethel, the God of Bethel and then he got his rest.

So many servants of God got stuck just like Paul. And the Lord would come and say, why you kick against the gourd; you try to do things your way. And we heard a lot in the last few days about Isaiah getting stuck and John getting stuck. Let me ask you one question. Once they came to the end of themselves, and they met God, were they still stuck? Do you know what the letter to the Ephesians is? Do you think that Paul was stuck? When you read this letter, do you think Paul was stuck? Was he stuck in today? You know what today is? It is jail. But Paul was unstoppable. He was buoyant. He was not held down by today. After Isaiah saw the vision, he was totally undone, but he was unstuck. Do you see where we are heading with this?

The Holy Spirit and His whole desire are to bring you into the Lord's fullness and His reality. So what is this eternal purpose? My topic is pursuing the eternal purpose. But I do not want to put it that way. And please, brothers forgive me for putting it that way. I think the real key is this. We are stuck until we are arrested by the Christ of the eternal purpose. One day when we were stuck He came to meet us. Thereafter, we not only see He is the end of God's plan, but we see that He is the only one who can fulfill God's plan. And He takes away that self in us. And once He has apprehended us, then the eternal purpose pursues you. Now many of us have talked about the eternal purpose. I do not see apart from Christ how you can know the eternal purpose. It is hard to explain but I just say I used to be a minister of some importance. I thought what I did was very important to God. So He took it all away. He said now you cannot do anything without me. And watch what my Son can do. I began to watch the Lord Jesus fulfilled His purpose in His church. And I found I have a place in cooperating with His purpose.

Now are you stuck? We can talk all the talk we want about vision. We can talk all the talk we want about eternal purpose. But if you are really stuck, it is good news as long as it is called

today. You are about to have an interview with Jesus Christ. And you will learn to fly; undeniable, unstoppable, and buoyant. How can you look at today and be buoyant? How could John look at the condition of the seven churches and overcome? John was the best and the last of the apostle that could do anything to build the church. Still the church at that time was in decline. Then Jesus came to John and said to him, 'move over, John, I am the high priest of this church. I know how to bring my bride out of this'. And John went soaring through the whole Book of Revelation. He was set free by the glorious vision of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters let us not aim low and just get on with the stuck version of our life. Someone wants to apprehend us and to bring us from today into eternity.

Prayer

My father, we thank You for Jesus Christ who set us free. Oh set us free from ourselves and our lousy routine. Lord, forgive us if we are so Laodicea and we are satisfied with where we are. We want to be unstoppable, buoyant, and though given the limitations today not to be subject to the limitations. God of eternity, meet with each one of the saints who admit they are stuck and has no way out except in You. Open the heaven and come down and show us You are in total control of our lives. We bow before You. Show us the Christ of the eternal purpose. We pray in His precious name. Amen.