

Purpose Until Death

By Jim Elliff



I queried an older man who had become a dear friend with a pointedly stark question: what is your purpose in life? He is advanced in years. He ought to know by now. The question struck home, and he teared up trying to answer it.

He failed. He had nothing much to say. And he felt the pain of the emptiness that lingered in the air as he tried. He seemed

not to like what fumbled out and admitted he was unable to answer satisfactorily. I appreciated his honesty.

Imagine what it means for anyone, young or old, to exist for a precious few years on planet earth, staring at eternity during his or her only trip through, without any noble purpose. Imagine coasting in neutral to hell. I once read the final statement of a person of notoriety in journalism who had taken his life. He wrote, “I might as well have played ping pong all my life.”

But Jesus said that we are salt and light, two words that describe our purpose as Christians. Look at his words:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out to be trampled under foot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16-18, LSB)

Salt

Salt comes out of the earth (“you are the salt of the earth”) as something distinctive from the earth. If that which is made to be distinctive from the earth has no distinctiveness, it is of no benefit. Just return it to the earth and let it be trampled

like the ground. Perhaps Christ is meaning either that some professing to be salt are not except in name only, or that some professing to be salt are by the admixture of the earth made bland by worldliness so as to have no distinctiveness. The end consequence is that such persons are not different but are just like the earth itself. Hence, they are worthless to God.

Do you see the purposefulness in being salt in the world? We exist to be distinct.

Light

We are not only distinctive as salt, but we are illuminating as light. We exist to be illuminating as light in a room and light on a hill. That is, as light, we open the minds of those around us about Christ through our clarity or the lucidity of our words and actions. We let this light shine by being faithful to God in our works, which include words as well as actions. For instance, Jesus said that they will know that the Father sent Christ into the world by the unity that believers have (John 17:23) and outsiders will know that we are disciples of Christ by our love for each other within the family of God (John 13:35). That is, we are illuminating to the world as we live in love.

We must not think that being salt and light makes everyone love us. Men love darkness rather than light, Jesus said (John 3:19). We have all felt the jabs and innuendos from relatives and friends who think we are strange in our devotion for Christ. Yet, to those whom God is calling, our distinctiveness and brightness is appealing and instrumental in their right view of the blessedness of being in Christ.

These two, salt and light, provide the great purposes of our lives as believers. God will bring you into certain ministries or callings or activities that will give structure to this, but remembering constantly that we have been made to be distinct in the world and illuminating is enough to give you that reason for living you desperately need.

In the sick room or the board room; as the least, or the notable; as the youngest or the venerated elderly; as the untutored or the erudite — you are salt and light, distinctive and illuminating. This is your purpose. Believe that, for it is true, and the emanating works and words will bear it out.

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