Predetermined Days

(Psalm 139:15-16)

5/15/22

Main Point: God has given us the gift of life. May we not squander it by believing that we are the master of the universe, but instead, believing that God is the master. We are created uniquely by God to fulfill God’s purpose, which is always for His glory and for our good.

INTRODUCTION

I love sports and I follow the Houston’s sports team closely. However, because of my busy work schedule, seldom do I watch the games. Various times, I would check the final score. Then I decide whether to watch the highlights or not. If we won, I will check it out. But if we lost, I do not waste my time looking at the game. There is a big advantage in watching the game when you know who is going to win. Even though your team is losing in the middle of the game, you do not worry because you know the final result. Well, God has the vantage point of knowing the final score for each of our lives. He has written the final chapter. Although there might be a lot of drama of ups and downs in our lives, we can be encouraged if we follow His purposes, we will know what the final result will be.

This reminds me of our scripture reading this morning from Psalms 139:15-16, “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” I like how NIV translate v.16: “Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” God makes it clear that he is the sovereign God. Nothing happens to us unless it goes through the hands of God. He knows all that will happen to us. He has purposes set up for us so that we can enjoy life to its fullest. God has given us the gift of life. May we not squander it, but enjoy it. Don’t be deceived by false claims of life. Instead, embrace God’s truths. When we do so, then we will have the confidence to finish the race that God has ordained for us.

We have been going through a mini-series called “The Goodness of Givenness.” We’re trying to draw greater awareness to a dominant idea regarding selfhood- how we view ourselves. It is the belief in the Sovereign Self. It basically believes that we are the master of the universe. Everything revolves around me. This morning, I would like to look at three false claims from our dominant self in comparison to God’s truths. 1) We claim to be the master of the universe, but in reality, God is the master of the universe. 2) We claim that our purpose in life is our happiness, but God’s purpose is His glory and our good. 3) We claim that we control our destiny or contribute it to luck, but God’s providence will achieve His sovereignty. God has given us the gift of life. May we not squander it, but see life in light of God’s perspective.

1. We claim to be the master of the universe, but God is the master of the universe

Most people think that they are in charge. The universe revolves around them. What are most important to them is me, myself and I. This is a man, who is self-centered. He has a self-sufficient mindset. Let us take a look at (James 4:13-15) “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit; yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.  Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

James addresses the business man, who is self-assured of his traveling plans as well as his schedule and future results. He was so certain and definite that all of his plans would work out just as he prearranged it. Many of us are like this business man. We deceive ourselves into thinking we are in control, but in reality, we are not. We tend to over-estimate our abilities. We claim that we have graduated from a renowned university with a masters and doctorate degree. We claim that we are smart and have everything under control. We deceive ourselves thinking that we will be around for a long time.

ILLUSTRATION: I am a very organized person that likes to plan things out ahead of time. I had a master plan as to when I was going to get married. As a youth counselor, it was common that I was asked when one should get married. I quickly responded by saying, “At 25 years old. One would have been out of college for several years. He or she would have saved some money and have matured by being out in the marketplace.” Well, that all sounded logical. However, at 25, nothing happened.

I thought I was the master of the universe, but that was not the case. The Bible says in (Col. 1:16) “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him.” Life is not about me, but it is all about God.

Kings and rulers have claimed that they are the ones who are in charge. We see an example in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar, who was the king of Babylon. Let us turn to Daniel 4:30, “And the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty? While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your swelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”

Instead of boasting about all the things that we have accomplished, may we humble ourselves realizing that it was God who gave us the ability to do all the things that we have done. For the Bible says, “Pride goes before destruction.” We either humble ourselves before the Lord or he will humble us as we have seen in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. In (Deut. 8:12-17) Moses reminded us that when we are successful, pride will raise up and we will forget that it is the Lord that gave us the ability to be successful. WE are to be grateful that God is the master of the universe and He is the creator that gives us the ability to achieve things. I am reminded in James 4:15, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” God is in charge and may we submit ourselves to Him. Lord, is this where you want me to go to school? Lord, is this the job you want me to take? Lord, is this the girl that I should date? We are reminded from (Isa. 55:8,9) “My thoughts not your thoughts; my ways higher than your ways: key is to know God.” If we want to maximize life, may we submit ourselves to God as the master of the universe.

Because we claim to be the master of the universe, we like to play the role of God. Let us see what Scripture has to say about that. In (Isa. 48:11, Today English Version) “What I do is done for my own sake- I will not let my name be dishonored or let anyone else share the glory that should be mine and mine alone.” God is in charge and does not want anyone to take any credit for His glory. [ A second false claim about life is that our purpose in life is our happiness, but God’s purpose is His glory and our good. ]

1. We claim that our purpose in life is our happiness, but God’s purpose is His glory and our good.

We claim that our purpose in life is our happiness. Life is to kick back eat, drink and be merry. It reminds me of the parable of the rich fool. (Luke 12: 16-23) And he told them a parable, saying “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, “What shall I do, for I have no where to store my crops?” and he said, “I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” God has a time table as to when our time on earth is up.

How we receive the greatest fulfillment is by accomplishing the purposes that God has prepared for us (Eph. 2;10,NIV), “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We are not here for our happiness, but for God as God’s workmanship. We are all wired differently with unique gifts and passion to bring glory to God and to bring goodness to others.

For many people, life is all about me. What is it in for me? What do I gain from this? How am I going to be happy from being involved in this activity? Happiness tends to focus on the external things: like our outer beauty, our possessions, and our pleasures. It is all about me. We are reminded from (Col. 1:16) that all things were created by Him & for Him.

(Romans 8:28) “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” The Apostle Paul provides here a beautiful promise, but it is conditional. As a matter of fact, there are two conditions: Before we can be assured that all things work together for good, we need to first love God and secondly, be carrying out God’s purpose. We might not see the final result right away. But God is working behind the scene to bring Him glory and bring us good. God loves His children and desires to provide good to us. Sometime, that good might include pain and suffering.

Various times, we complain that everything is going wrong and we question where is God? Why is He silent? Why has He not rescued me from my trouble? It is all a matter of timing. We all want to solve the problem right away. But we do not see the whole picture. Before giving the solution, God wants to work in our heart to change us first. Are we willing to submit ourselves to God and believe in Him? Are we willing to humble ourselves and acknowledge that we do not know everything and we are powerless and inadequate? Usually, it is pride that hinders us from yielding to the Lord. God wants us to walk by faith and not by sight. Are we focused on ourselves or are we focused on God? Too often we view happiness based on what I can do for myself. The more we depend on ourselves, the less we think we need God. It is when we recognize who God is that we feel how small we are. Unfortunately, we inflate who we are and deflate who God is. But when we get it right, then we are motivated to love God and to pursue to do God’s will because we know what is good for God is good for us. Our Lord cherishes us because we belong to Him. In spite of our wickedness, He is still there to pick us up when we fall.

SONG: WHO AM I? (Casting Crown)

God’s purpose is for His glory and our good. Things are rarely what it appears on the outside. ILLUSTRATION: There are times we go through a time of uncertainty or a time of pain. May we choose to walk by faith and not by sight. This week, I received an alarming text from my sister stating that my dad, who has Alzheimers attempted to assault my mom by swinging his cane at her and throwing heavy objects at her. Thank God she was not hurt, but she was greatly frightened. My sisters, who have been caring for my parents, are exhausted. As the older son, I feel I have a duty to go home to take care of my parents. I have asked to take time off and I will be leaving tomorrow to go home. I do not know what is going to happen ahead of me. But I know that I need to be home now. I know I am not alone. I will trust God knowing that even in times of confusion, God’s purpose is for His glory and our good. I ask that you pray for wisdom and patience for me.

(Isa. 46:10,11) My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please. What I planned, that will I do.” God’s ways are higher than our ways. Therefore, we are wise to align our will with God’s will so that we can maximize our lives during the brief period of time on this earth.

1. We claim that we control our destiny, but God’s providence will achieve His sovereignty.

The 3rd and final false claim is that we control our destiny or we attribute it to good luck, but God’s providence will achieve His sovereignty. Things that happen are not based on our control or upon luck. Instead it is based on God’s Providence, which is how God connect things, and arranges things in order to wind up in God’s sovereign plan. Although we want to be in control, actually, there are many things that are out of our control. But God is in control. God has authority and power over all things. (Prov. 19:21) “Many are the plans in a man’s heart. But it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” WE can plan all that we want, but if it does not align with God’s purpose, then it is not going to happen. It is wise if we find out what God’s purpose or will is, and adjust our plans to match His.

When we looked at the life of Joseph in Genesis, it appears that he had good days and bad days both in his family and work. He had good days when His father expressed his love for Joseph by buying him a special coat. On the other hand, he had bad days as Joseph’s brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites as a slave. At work, he had good days when his boss entrusted his whole household to him, but he had bad days when his boss’s wife accused him of raping her. One can say that Joseph had good luck on some days and bad luck on other days. But what really happened is in the hand of God. We see this in (Genesis 50:20, NIV) “ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” God allowed Joseph to be sold as a slave and accused of rape to accomplish the Lord’s purpose. This is demonstration of God’s providence. God used what appeared to be evil to accomplish good in the life of Joseph. In a matter of fact, He did it on purpose.

Many times, what appears to be random has order in it. It is God’s providence. God is working behind the scenes connecting random dots to accomplish His will. I like how Tony Evans illustrates providence by using a conductor. At the beginning of a concert, when the musicians play, it appears to sound random, disconnected, discombobulated, and hard to listen. But when the conductor shows up, what sounds like chaos, now make sense. What was disjoined becomes beautiful harmonious music.

We might complain that our life is in chaos. But what we need to do is to keep our eyes upon the conductor. Don’t leave the concert too early just because it does not sound right. The conductor will bring harmony out of discord.

ILLUSTRATION: Last year at a wedding reception, what seemed to be a terrible thing turned out to be good. In the middle of the meal, Ellie was not feeling well. Just at that moment, Alex, who sat next to Ellie, excused himself to go to the restroom. Ellie asked if she can get up to walk around. We walked to the room where the wedding ceremony was located. All of a sudden she fainted, falling forward. It just happened that I was standing in front of her and I caught her. Just prior to that moment, Charlie and Dorcas were going to the restroom, which was located close to where we were. They saw that Ellie had fainted and they quickly ran over to see how they could help. I asked them to get help. Charlie ran back to the reception to call for help. As I caught Ellie, I noticed that her eyes were bulging out staring at me. I was really frightened because it reminded me of old Gung Fu movies when someone has died, their eyes were bulging out. For a moment, I thought Ellie was dead. Less than half a minute after Ellie fainted, Alex Young, who is a doctor, came out of the restroom. I quickly waved him over. He checked her pulse; he assured me that she was alive. I was totally relieved. Akhil and Michelle, who were doctors came shortly to help. They were able to care for Ellie. Ambulance was called. We were asked what hospital we want to take her to. Since she recently had surgery at Memorial Hermann, we told the medic to take us there. Just at that moment, Alex knocked at the ambulance door to see if everything was okay. We told him that we were going to Memorial Hermann Hospital. Alex said that his brother in-law works in Memorial Hermann Hospital and he is an emergency doctor. Alex called his brother in-law and found out that he is on duty and he just got to the hospital to start his evening shift. What appeared to be intended to harm Ellie, God intended it for good.

This is God’s providence at work, where God is working behind the scenes by connecting random things together to accomplish his will. It just happened that Dr. Alex Young, who lives in Boston, flew in for the weekend to attend the wedding. It just happened that Alex just went to the restroom before Ellie wanted to take a walk. It just happen that Ellie sat down close to where the restroom was. It just happened that I was standing in front of Ellie when she fainted. It just happened that Charlie and Dorcas was going to the restroom when they saw Ellie fainted. It just happened that Alex came out of the restroom shortly after Ellie fainted. It just happened that Alex’s brother in-law works in Memorial Hermann hospital. It just happened that he was an emergency room doctor, and he just started his shift that evening. That is providence, where God was working behind the scenes to connect all the dots to accomplish His purpose. What intended to be evil, God intended it for good.

In spite of our pride, selfishness, and a wandering heart, God still loves us. He cares for us. Although we are like a vapor that appears for a short time, God still hears our calling for help and is there to catch us when we fall. Life is filled with ups and downs. But God knows every turn that we take in our journey of life. May we acknowledge that God is the master of the universe and God’s purpose is for His glory and our good. Therefore, we can wait upon Him and trust in the Lord because we are His children. God’s providence will achieve His sovereignty. We can have confidence to finish the race well.

For those that do not know Him personally, I invite you to trust Jesus as your personal savior. It is not because of who we are that will save us, but because of what God has done. He has died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin. Not because of what we have done to save us, but because of who God is. He loves us and has provided salvation for us.