

**Your calling to ministry...How many of you were able to participate in the Jerry Lucas weekend? He in many ways echoed what I have been trying to point out in the lives of those whose stories of being called are told in the Bible and reveal what I am trying to say tonight about your life and mine. He mentioned how remarkable you are as creatures, made in the image and likeness of God, with miraculous mental and spiritual capacities. We live in a world which consistently undervalues and miscalculates people. People struggle with issues of self worth everywhere in our society. But the Bible declares boldly the inestimable value of human life. You are of such value to the one and only Judge whose opinion matters that he was willing to die for you! I wonder if we can even get our minds around that incredible statement. Your life matters...to God! The Cross declares it publically. You were made, created and redeemed for a purpose...ordained by God BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE! Read Ephesians 1:3-2:10. Please pay attention and follow the logic of Paul's argument. WE WERE CHOSEN BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE. WE WERE RESCUED despite our sins and ADOPTED AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE KING, given inheritance, seated on the throne with God and the Risen and Ascended Christ, for a PURPOSE...GOOD WORKS AND GOD'S GLORY!**

**Ordained from before Creation...God's original intent...Eph. 1:10...All things united in Him or under His authority...all things working according to the counsel of His will...this was the plan from the beginning...this is the future and what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer... "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." See Is 49:1,5; Jer 1:5-11; Gal 1:15 CALLED BEFORE CREATION...THINK OF IT!**

**God's design for your life. Your life matters. You were created and redeemed for a purpose...God's glory, God's Kingdom, Your unique design, gifts, calling. There is no one like you...nor has there ever been nor will there ever be! We are creatures of space and time. We have been made for a purpose which involves where we have been placed, how we have been designed, and when our lives have been ordained to occur. Our lives make sense in the context in which God has placed us. We have been designed for the calling which God has ordained for us. Life, conscious life means we have a reason for being and a task for which we have been designed, that should engage our faculties. Even if and when we lose our faculties it does not mean that our lives have lost their purpose...only perhaps that our consciousness is no longer engageable. But we are still as humans, made in God's image and likeness, to bear his presence into the world...if only as an image. Even our last days, sometimes unresponsive days have purpose. We sometimes evaluate life on the basis of what a person can do...but God places value on us on the basis of what and whose we are. We are His image-bearers! We make Him visibly present wherever we are, however we are.**

**Hear the First and second questions and answers from the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, "What is my only comfort in life and in death? That I belong-body and soul, in life and in death-not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that with the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him." And Second question and answer, "How many things must you know that you may live and die in the blessedness of this comfort? Three. First, the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption."**

**Nothing wasted...your whole life...not just the days of belief but all of your story, God will use. What you learned and experienced prior to coming to faith is important and not to be thrown aside, as unimportant, or unuseful...we ought to be suspicious that God was at work...even then. We should come to view life from the perspective that God was there all along, God was ordering our steps even then, God will not waste those experiences and learnings but may refine them to fit them for Kingdom use. See 2 Cor 1:3-11 Paul's Baracha or Prayer for the Corinthian Church and his sense of reality and its purpose, even in the midst of chaos and struggle and pain. See also Ps 23:4 "Even though or Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...". Spoken in a context...the term valley of the shadow of death is a reference to a particular formation in the Judean wilderness...known as a wadi...in the Southwestern US we call them arroyos. When traveling through country with these formations one walks on the tops of the hills not down in the valleys...because of the danger of flash floods...but because of David's being hunted by King Saul he had to walk in the valleys because of the greater risk of being apprehended by the King or his army.**

**Our own individual creation tells us in the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, King David, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" Ps 139:14. Notice the way King David understands his life in this Psalm, in vv.14-16...he understood his life to be a story or script written by Yahweh BEFOREHAND! Predestination is often thought to be a peculiarly Presbyterian and Reformed doctrine...but it is a doctrine held by many and is intended not to frighten or deny human freedom and responsibility but to breed faith and confidence in God in the midst of the ambiguities of our lives. When our lives seem to make no sense, we are tempted to believe that God is not...or if he is...he is either impotent hence unable to help...or he is not as he appears in scripture but is, in fact, uncaring and unfeeling towards me or my situation. It seems that as believers we find ourselves in this dark place at least once in our lives. How important for us to know that even here we are not lost to God. Ps 139:8-12. How important for us to know that even here our lives have meaning and significance. That even here God is not only present but actively working and orchestrating our lives to fulfill the very purpose for which we have been created and redeemed. If our lives are God's gift and creation, if our lives are stories God himself has written, stories in which God is the hero, then God must show up and make sense of what seems to make no sense now...God must show up and demonstrate that you and I were made for a purpose and were led to that purpose for his glory, by his hand. God must show up and demonstrate that the story of our lives unfolded as it did for the larger purpose of the advance of the Kingdom of God. See 1 Cor 13:12. Why do we not know now?...why must we wait to know and understand why things are as they are? See Jn 16:12. It is not that God intends to never tell us but that we lack the capacity to receive it now...but not forever...in fact, it may well be that these most difficult things to understand will stand as ground for worship one day, when we have the capacity to hear and understand.**

**We have been made and have life for a purpose...not just the young but those who remember being young...not just those the world thinks gifted and brilliant but all of us. We have been uniquely designed for God's purpose and we will not experience our deepest joy and fulfillment until we realize our calling...we discover who God is and how God does things...as we answer our calling and fulfill our purpose. Thanks for reflecting on these things with me...but I hope you will use these Wednesdays and days between classes to reflect on your calling...it will be the source of deep and lasting joy...joy that can be found in no other way than responding to the call of the God who made you and sent his only Son to rescue you.**