

## MAKE IT COUNT

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** John 12:27

For our meditation this morning, I felt drawn back to the first sermon I preached twenty-seven years ago when we started the church. I preached John 12:32 "And I, if I am lifted up above the earth, will draw all men and women unto Myself." I have no idea what I said 27 years ago. This is a fresh work of God's Spirit on me as I was preparing for it.

### John 12:27-33

"<sup>27</sup> Jesus says, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what am I to say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again." <sup>29</sup> So the crowd who stood by and heard *it* were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him!" <sup>30</sup> Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for yours. <sup>31</sup> Now judgment is *upon* this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *people* to Myself." <sup>33</sup> Now He was saying this to indicate what kind of death He was going to die."

Shall we pray?

Heavenly Father, I pray that You would just pour out Your Spirit upon us, that as we look at this account of Your Son engaging with You and with People and with history, the history of the world, that we would have insight Lord, not only on what it means for us, but how it has to change us even now. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Different translations read this passage a little differently.

The King James Version says: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

The Living Bible says: "And when I am lifted up on the Cross, I will draw everyone to me."

The New Living Translation says: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."

As we look at this passage, it seems to us that Jesus is caught in a dilemma – to do or not to do the Father's will. It seems to be. and yet, in His very next words, it seems that He disses it completely. For He says, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."

It seems like He had an understanding of what this hour was going to mean for Him, that it was going to cost Him plenty. He understood very well what the cross meant for people who were crucified. He understood the Roman judicial system and how they treated criminals who were crucified on a cross. He understood, I'm sure, the jeering crowds that would be around any crucifixion, just mocking the people who had died, for they were criminals. I'm sure He understood the humiliation that He would feel as He hung on the cross, the agony of nails being driven into His hands and His feet. But then He adds that it was precisely for this particular moment, this impending death, gruesome, unwarranted death on a cross; it was the very reason for His incarnation.

Consider this, church, how often in our own journeys do we come to crossroads, when the easier, wider road that leads to perdition is the more welcoming route for us. And we have stopped and agonized about which road to take. We know the one less travelled is the one we ought to be on. But often, we choose the other.

Robert Frost brought this dilemma into poetic form, although not with this as a background. He writes in his poem 'The Road Not Taken',

I shall be telling this with a sign  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Jesus Himself said, "Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only few find it.

The road, beloved, that we need to take is a road that leads to life. and how does it lead to life? because it leads to purpose. And purpose gives us meaning in our life. "For this purpose, I came to this hour," Jesus said. The easier road will always be easier. But here's the thing – it doesn't fulfill your reason for living. The easier road never fulfills your reason for living. How redundant life would be if we went through life doing all kinds of things without fulfilling the purpose that God planted you and me here on earth for, that we just breathed the air, went through life but never fulfilled His purpose for us.

I think one of the questions for us this morning might be: Are we on the easy road, the broad road that doesn't lead to life? We could be on that road for a variety of reasons. We could be on that road because it's comfortable. It's more comfortable than the narrow road, and so we get onto that. we don't want to be inconvenienced about anything. Or we're tired of walking the narrow road. Too many difficulties, too many attacks by the evil one and we say, "I just want to get out of this. I just want to do what I want to do and pick an easier road. Or maybe once we did start down that road, hand in hand with the Lord, drawing power from Him. And somewhere along the road, we let go of His hand and tried to walk down the road by ourselves. maybe you're on that road today but not walking anywhere. You're sitting by the side of the road watching the other pilgrims go by. You can be on that road for a variety of reasons, but none of those reasons find purpose in your life.

"But for this purpose, I have come to this hour," Jesus said. "Father, glorify Thy name." How does God's name get glorified? When the purpose for our existence that's scripted by God Himself gets done here on earth, He is glorified. When what He wills for you and me in heaven when it gets fulfilled here on earth, God is glorified. Scripted in the pristine air of heaven, and yet fulfilled in the murky skies of our own terra firma, God is glorified. God's glory shine bright. That's why Jesus Himself said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We've just been through the epistle of James, who has been so strong in saying that there must be good works that emanate from the life of a Christian. In fact, it validates salvation, not that it's needed for salvation. If you and I are saved, automatically through that salvation, good works will flow. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify My Father in heaven." And yet, even as we think about good works, we need to realize that good works that have nothing to do with the will of God are of no use in the kingdom of God. You can fill your life by doing a lot of good things that have nothing to do with the will of God. And sometimes that is the easier

thing for us to do, that we find some good thing 'that the world calls good'. And we do it trying to assuage that need for us to do something. And yet, if it isn't part of God's will, it has no kingdom value, and it isn't fulfilling God's purpose for you.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that the works that we do one day will go through fire. And what is precious about it? gold, silver, precious stones will stay, but hay, stone and rubble will eat up the rest. It won't stand.

Jim Collins, an author, wrote many books on companies and how they excel and what they do to get into those spaces. And one of his most catching lines was this: "Good is the enemy of great." But sometimes we settle for good when God is saying, "I want you to be great." And that good, beloved, has nothing to do with God's will.

But a voice thundered in affirmation of Jesus' life of implicit obedience and fulfillment of God's every purpose. God spoke into that space and said, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again!" Jesus said, "Father, glorify Thy name." and God says, "It's done. I've been glorified through You for a long time. the things You have done and the things that You will do. You're on the right track, My Son. You've always been on the right track in all that You've done, for I have been glorified. And I know that I will be in the future as well."

Look at Jesus' baptism. God spoke and He said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Jesus hadn't yet started His earthly ministry, but God was pleased. At the transfiguration, God once again spoke, and He said, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." The pleasure of the Father rested on His Son because He continued to do the will of His Father, and fulfil every purpose. How wonderful it is to have God's pleasure rest upon us. to walk in that reality that God is pleased with me, God is glorified through everything that I am doing. What a beautiful place to be in. "You've done good. my will and purposes have been fulfilled. I've been glorified. The purpose for you being on earth has been and will continue to be fulfilled.

Wouldn't it be great, beloved, if that is the confirmation we receive every day in the things that we do? And maybe that should be one of our challenges today. Till now, as a church, we've done all that we know how to do in accordance with God's will. And only eternity will show us if what we've done is right. However, we have an opportunity to look ahead to everything that fulfils our purposes so that God would be glorified.

And even more importantly, to hear Him say, as He said to Jesus, that it will be glorified again. That He looks at each one of us, and is confident that through our lives, He will continue to be glorified. For the purpose of CAP to be fulfilled, each one of us need to be able to fulfil our purposes. Why are we here at CAP? What gifts and graces do we bring with us that we can use so that our purpose, yours and mine, is fulfilled? Then the collective purpose of the Church at Powai is fulfilled.

In v. 30, as the people talked about this voice from Heaven, Jesus responded and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for yours." Jesus didn't need to be reminded that He was doing the will of His Father. He was conscious of it. time and time again we read how He retreated from the crowds. He went away to the mountains, spent time alone seeking the Father's will so that He would be able to fulfil His purpose.

That must be the way to determine His purpose for our lives, to spend time with Him, quality time; to retreat, go away and say, "Lord, speak. Am I on that road that You want me to be? am I fulfilling the purposes that You have placed me here for? Am I glorifying You through my life? Or, as the

psalmist is saying, 'Lord, confirm for me the work of my hands.' Lord, You tell me whether all that I'm doing is worthwhile from a kingdom perspective."

v. 31 Jesus says, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." The Greek word that is used for judgment in the original Greek actually, is the word crisis – translated as judgment in the English bible. There is a crisis in the world. What is the crisis? The crisis is this conflict between Satan and God. And Jesus is in the midst of that crisis. And He says, "Judgment is now upon this world." Why? because Jesus knows that He is going to do what is necessary. The crisis is a crisis of decision. Will we continue to be ensnared and trapped and held by Satan? Or will we be saved and freed to live the kind of life God wants us to live? That's the decision that we have to make.

And Jesus resolves the crisis by saying, "No, the ruler of this world will be cast out." Now the ruler, God's will, the purpose of Jesus on earth and the dethroning of Satan have come to a flash point. And that flash point is the Cross – the point of crisis, the point of fulfilled purpose. That's why Jesus says in v. 32, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."

John adds a comment in v.33 "Now He was saying this to indicate what kind of death He was going to die." Lifted up from the earth meant the cross. The death of Jesus, the penalty of our sins being paid, the wrath of God being assuaged, men and women being freed from the clutches of sin and judgment on Satan. The cross, flash point, point of crisis. Through His death, Jesus opened the way for all humanity, not only during that time, but for all of us in the dispensation of grace to find Him.

That is at the heart of that 32<sup>nd</sup> verse, that through the finished work of Calvary, the gates have been opened for men and women to throng into the kingdom of God. That's been the central theme of the church at Powai from day 1, that we will endeavor to talk about, to sing about, to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus in everything that we do, so that we could showcase this open door that has been set before us, for the people of Powai, for Mumbai, for India, and for the rest of the world. Our job, our purpose is to be presenters of Jesus, presenters of the gospel message. Nothing more. The decision to accept that presentation, to deal with it, rests with the ones you've shared it with, and the One who continues to seek the hearts of men and women. And His assurance is that him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. I won't cast out anybody that comes to Me.

That was our mandate 27 years ago, and it is our mandate today as well, that we will be faithful in lifting up the story of the cross so that men and women will find Jesus and through Him, life in abundance and life for eternity.

For me, every CAP anniversary that we celebrate, at some stage in all the feelings of gratitude to God and the celebration and understanding His faithfulness, there's a tinge of sadness in me. And I use this word positively. I'll tell you the reason for it. when we left the US to come back and start the church, I was pastoring a church there. The Faith Baptist Church. The initial hymn book that we had was the one that we used in that church. The cross that used to hang here for almost 20 odd years is the cross that hung in that church. It now hangs in the Sunday School room. The communion trays that we use are the communion trays that were part of that church. When we told them that we were going back to India, they begged us to stay. But we had to say no. the call that we have is to go back to India. And over much of their pleas, we stuck to what God was calling us to do.

That church shut when we left. That's why we have all these things with us. I still remember somebody saying after it closed, that for something to live, something has to die. But more than that, the Sunday School superintendent of the church was a man who had been an alcoholic for 25 years. One day while driving, he went off the road and landed in a hospital. On his discharge, he realized

that there was only one thing to do, and that was to find God again. his wife drove him to our church. She parked in the parking lot, but didn't come in. She told him that he had to go in on his own. He did and he met Jesus again, rededicated his life and grew. Pretty soon we put him in charge of the Sunday school. A wonderful disciple of Jesus. But when the church closed, he never went back to a church. Later, I heard that he had lapsed back into drinking. A few years later they found him in his bathtub. He had been dead for a couple of days.

Another family, good friends of ours would love to come to church. They would come for the morning service and for the evening service. When we left, they never darkened the door of a church again. I meet them every time I go to the US. We sit and talk about God, and I talk to them about scriptures. But they never go back to church.

When I think of CAP, and how God called us, the one thing I say to the Lord is: Lord, when I get to heaven, I need to know how that happened, that we could come back here and start the church. And yet, because of the closing of a church there, people got lost. It breaks my heart every time I think about it. There's a movie that I watched some years ago – Saving Private Ryan. It's the story of a platoon of soldiers that were sent to find one soldier who was out there in the front lines during the war. The order had come from the President, because out of 4 brothers, 3 had been killed in battle. The army decided that this family was not going to lose this son as well. so they sent a platoon to get him back. He was out there without communication. The platoon was sent there and trying to get through to him. One by one, they lost men until finally only the sergeant was left. And he was wounded badly. But he was sitting in front of Private Ryan and he told him. "My orders are to make sure you go back." Then he caught hold of the private's shirt and he said, "Make it count. For you, a whole platoon of people died. Make your life count."

Today we're a church. Today we have a wonderful fellowship. Today we have a place to meet. But there was also in the history, people who gave up things for us. And if they could speak, I'm sure they would say to each one of us: Make it count.

Amen.

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