

Series: On Purpose

January 8, 2017

## **Title: Our Grand Vocation**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: Romans 8:28-30**

### **More than guests**

#### **Airbnb, anyone?**

You're a nice couple living in Calgary, CA, and you agree to rent out your family home to a foursome who say they are in town for a wedding. What could possibly go wrong?

This was the experience of Mark and Star King in April, 2015. They handed over the keys to their home on a Friday evening. By Sunday they were getting alarming texts from their neighbors about fights on the lawn and the ongoing destruction of their home.

### **[Slide 2]**

It turns out that on Saturday night a party bus and cars pulled up, delivering 100 partiers. Once let loose inside the house, they smashed furniture, plugged toilets, splattered mayonnaise and barbecue sauce all over the walls, and left puddles of alcohol, cigarette butts and broken glass everywhere. Star King even found chicken meat in her shoes!

In her words: "We came and wished the home was burnt down to ashes. It would have felt way better."

### **[Slide 3]**

In the end, the house had to be gutted and stripped bare – even the flooring and base boards had to be removed. Damages were north of \$150,000. And the Kings were out of their home – if you could call it that – for months.

#### **Expectations:**

That was never the way it was *supposed* to be, of course. The idea was that the 4 renters would understand the great privilege and responsibility granted to them when the Kings handed them the keys to their home on Friday evening. The Kings assumed that these 4 people would care for their home

in the same way that they would care for their own homes or apartments. That's the way Airbnb is supposed to work.

But the 4 renters had other intentions. For them, the King's home was a little world to be exploited and trashed. They invited 100 fellow partiers to join in the orgy of drugs and destruction.

The result was that the King's little world was destroyed. Star King said, "The house wasn't our home when we last saw it. It was some other place."

### **The Grand Vocation:**

Mark and Star King's nightmare is a parable of what has happened to the good world that God created as our home. N.T. Wright explains that when God created the world, His creation was to serve:

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*"...as a kind of Temple, a heaven-and-earth duality, where humans function as the 'image-bearers' in the cosmic Temple, part of the earth, yet reflecting the life and love of heaven." (N.T. Wright, The Day the Revolution Began, p. 76)*

Think of it: God called us to, as Wright puts it, "stand at the dangerous but exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet." (Wright, p. 76). We're given the keys to God's earthly home – His Temple. We "run the show" in His place. We can clean up the kitchen or leave it a mess. We can polish the furniture or smash it to pieces. We can discover powerful antibiotics or make hydrogen bombs. We can build cathedrals or slums.

So far, our record as house stewards leaves much to be desired!

### **A World Gone Wrong**

#### **Spiritual gifts:**

Paul wrote a letter to a church he had founded in the Greek city of Corinth. His goal: to help them become "genuinely human" as followers of Jesus and bearers of God's image and likeness. In other words, he wanted them to become the opposite of the world-wreckers that the human race had turned out to be. We find a description of what it does and does not mean to be "genuinely human" in Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians.

Paul begins this way:

**[Slide 5]**

*1 Corinthians 12:1 NIV*

*Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.*

Paul was writing to people who knew a lot about *spirituality*. It was assumed in Paul's world – whether Jewish or pagan – that you believed in God or the gods. Corinth was filled with temples where heaven and earth were thought to intersect and where a particular deity was thought to be present. Each temple had its priests and rituals. This was how the world was kept on track.

So how did all this spirituality relate to the coming of Jesus and His gift of victory over sin and death? Was the Holy Spirit from Jesus just another garden variety spirit, like all the other offerings in the various pagan temples? Or was there something totally unique about Jesus and His Spirit? What did spirituality have to do with becoming genuinely human?

**Mute idols:**

Paul begins the contrast between pagan spirituality and the Holy Spirit by reminding his readers of their past "Airbnb" horror stories:

**[Slide 6]**

*1 Corinthians 12:2 NIV*

*You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols.*

The key to the failure of the human race is summed up in the last word of that verse: *idols*.

Wright explains that terrible things happen when humans abandon their God-given vocation and worship the creation instead of the Creator. He writes:

**[Slide 7]**

*"When we worship and serve forces within the creation (the creation for which we were supposed to be responsible!), we hand over our power to other forces only too happy to usurp our position. (Wright, p. 77)*

Think of just how happy 100 non-paying partiers were to lay waste to Mark and Star King's home that April weekend! The person who made the Airbnb reservation let them in the front door. When he did, he "handed over his power to other forces." Once the party was on, there was nothing he could have done to stop the destruction – even if he had wished to.

This is the point Paul is making to the Christians in Corinth. There was a time when they invited all the demons of Hell into God's good world. Sure, they set up "mute idols" in their temples – statues of bronze or marble that would never utter a peep. But at a deeper level, the dark forces that are set upon destroying God's world, took advantage of the fact that these worshipers were worshiping aspects of God's creation instead of the Creator.

### **Slaves:**

As a result, we became slaves to the very forces we introduced to God's world. Again, in Wright's words:

#### **[Slide 8]**

*"We humans...handed our power and authority to nondivine and nonhuman forces, which have then run rampant, spoiling human lives, ravaging the beautiful creation, and doing their best to turn God's world into a hell.*

#### **[Slide 9]**

*"...some of these 'forces' are familiar (money, sex, power). Some are less familiar in the popular mind, not least the sense of a dark, accusing 'power' standing behind all the rest." (Wright, p. 77)*

We were meant to care for God's world with God's wisdom and power. Instead, we have become slaves to the dark, destructive forces that humans have worshiped in God's place.

We have to *know* this if we are to *know* how to get back on track.

## **Our Grand Vocation**

### **Our true confession:**

Getting back on track begins with the decision to worship and honor the one true Creator God. This is the only way that we can fulfill our spiritual role and become “genuinely human.” Paul writes:

**[Slide 10]**

*1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV*

*Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*

Our true spirituality focuses ever and only on the one true Lord: Jesus. Jesus came as God in human form. He came as the first human being to truly bear God’s image and likeness. As John wrote:

**[Slide 11]**

*John 1:18 NIV*

*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

When we confess “Jesus is Lord,” we announce to all the false gods and all the false “lords” that they are no longer welcome. They must vacate the premises. The evil party is over!

**Our Grand Vocation:**

Think of it: God has called you to His grand vocation. You have been given the keys to a part of His good creation. He has entrusted to you the gift of life – each breath and each heartbeat is a gift from Him. He has entrusted other fellow humans to you, and you to them. He has placed you in his wonderful and ever-amazing world. You are no less than His priest – a royal priest at that! – in His cosmic Temple.

You were designed to be *the place in this world* where heaven and earth come together.

But none of this can happen until you get your worship priorities in order. The demonic forces of this world will tell you to say “Jesus be cursed!” They will want to continue to crash the party and make you and your world their slave.

Jesus came to dethrone these evil forces. In his death and resurrection He defeated sin and death – the dark forces behind all of the world’s hurt and ruin. He alone deserves the title “Lord.” In fact, Paul tells us that one day all of creation – including those same dark forces – will bow before Him:

**[Slide 12]**

*Philippians 2:9-11 NIV*

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Our privilege and calling is to bow before him now and through the Holy Spirit say: “Jesus is Lord!”

## **LIFE Group Lesson for “Our Grand Vocation”**

### **Ice Breaker:**

- Take a few minutes to bring others in the group “up to date” on things that have happened since the group last met.
- What is your biggest goal for 2017?

### **Our Grand Vocation:**

- God placed us here on earth to reflect His glory into His world *and* to reflect Creation’s praise back to Him.
- This is what it means to be made “in His image.”
- Whatever the mirror of our heart reflects is what we most value and what we worship.
- God called us to aim the mirror of our hearts toward Him alone. Thus the words of the Great Commandment: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”
- This is our calling – our grand *vocation*.

### **What has gone wrong with the image-bearers?**

- So why is the world in such a mess, if we are empowered to reflect God’s love, justice, goodness, mercy and healing power into His world?
- Paul explains the reason for humanity’s failure in Romans 1. Read Romans 1:18-23.
- Did you pick up on the “exchange” that Paul speaks of in verse 23?
- Humans turned the mirror of the soul on created things instead of the Creator. It was a “worship exchange” with dreadful consequences.
- He enumerates the kinds of things that have gone wrong when the mirror is focused on creation or ourselves instead of on God. Read verse 28-32.
- We call all of these moral failures “sins,” and that is what they are. But the root cause of all of these sins lies in the failure to worship God alone as Creator and Lord of all.
- This is what has gone wrong with the image-bearers, including you and me.

### **Fulfilling our grand vocation:**

- The cure to the problem is not simply to “try and be a better person,” or to try to keep the rules.
- The cure to the problem is to turn the mirror away from ourselves or the other things that have commanded our worship, and aim it at God alone.
- We cannot do this on our own. It only happens when we invite God’s Spirit to live inside us and have the final say in our lives.
- What are some things that you find yourself depending on instead of God and His loving care for you? What would it mean to turn the mirror to Him?

**Share and Pray:**

- Remember that goal you have for 2017?
- Take some time to pray with at least one other person in the group for God’s will and strength in fulfilling this part of your life calling.