Resurrection Day and the Meaning of Life

Easter 2022

One of the oft most asked questions in philosophy is “What is the meaning of life?”

There is no shortage of answers to this question. If you want those answers type the question into Google.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism sums up the meaning of life in it’s first question and answer.

The question is worded, “What is the chief end of man?”

And the reply says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

This leaves mankind’s specific purposes pretty open. There are a lot of ways to bring praise and glory to God.

Loving others, serving others, being a good steward of the things God has created, living a quiet life and working with your hands, even in these categories there are multiple ways that we can live out the true meaning of life.

But what about the last part of the answer? How can we “Enjoy Him Forever?”

Solomon a man, who arguably, had it all and did it all said this of the “good life.”

2 I said to myself, “Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” But I found that this, too, was meaningless. 2 So I said, “Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?” 3 After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.

4 I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. 6 I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. 7 I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. 8 I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!

9 So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. 10 Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. 11 But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 NLT

This doesn’t mean that he didn’t enjoy the good things that God had given him. It also isn’t meant to say that hard work doesn’t pay off. But all the work and the pleasures of this life are utterly meaningless if our aim is to enjoy God forever. Even the best life can’t get us into forever. This is one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul said:

We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, 4 though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ.[c] For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Philippians 3:3-11 NLT

Remember Paul also wrote:

“…if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 15 And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. 16 And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. 18 In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! 19 And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”

1 Corinthians 15:14-19 NLT

Our faith in the crucified and resurrected Jesus is the only thing that can fulfill our chief aim in life. It is the only thing that opens the door for us to enjoy God now, as well as forever.

This is why Jesus once said to His followers:

9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10 The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:9-10 NLT

Jesus came to give us a rich and satisfying life, in relationship with God, now and forevermore.

So how does that happen? It happens by finding rest. The rest that can only be found in trusting Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The baptisms you witnessed today symbolize this very thing. People who have been saved have buried their old meaningless attempts to find the “good life.” Instead they chose to have those attempts put to death so they could be raised to life in Christ. The writer of Hebrews once penned:

4 God’s promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. 2 For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn’t share the faith of those who listened to God. 3 For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said,

“In my anger I took an oath:

 ‘They will never enter my place of rest,’”

even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. 4 We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: “On the seventh day God rested from all his work.” 5 But in the other passage God said, “They will never enter my place of rest.”

6 So God’s rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. 7 So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted:

“Today when you hear his voice,

 don’t harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:1-7 NLT

The fullest possible enjoyment of God in this life and forever only comes through entering into His rest. A rest that comes from knowing and trusting in our crucified and resurrected Savior. It’s hard to believe it, that’s why the scriptures say we should work hard to enter His rest. That is why so many don’t believe it. Hard hearts are always seeking to trust themselves, their own works and their own ideas about what fulfillment in life looks like.

The chief aim of Jesus’ life was to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday were the very pinnacle of Him showing God glory.

Before we go on with the account of Jesus’ death, I want to share with you four questions that you can ask to consider whether you are living for God’s glory or your own. For simplicity sake you can remember them as the four T’s.

Are you **thinking** about Jesus?

Are you **talking** about Jesus?

Are you **thanking** Jesus?

And most importantly are you **trusting** in Jesus?

Without evidence of these things in our lives, then it is likely that we are thinking, talking, thanking, and trusting in ourselves or whatever else that we have elevated as arrival in this life. In a way we have betrayed God and our chief aim in life, which is to bring Him glory and enjoy Him forever.

Jesus had been betrayed to the Jewish leaders, for 30 pieces of silver, by one of His own disciples. Judas, who had seen Jesus heal, do miracles, and teach God’s wisdom to so many, decided that money was worth more than His relationship with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Jewish leaders, however, didn’t want Jesus’ blood on their hands so they turned Him over to the Roman government. This is where we will begin with the account of Good Friday.

22 Pilate responded, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

23 “Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?”

But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

24 Pilate saw that he wasn’t getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. The responsibility is yours!”

And even though the Jews were not supposed to crucify people, in this case, they were ready to break there own rules…After all, technically, it was the Romans who were doing the crucifying.

25 And all the people yelled back, “We will take responsibility for his death—we and our children!”

26 So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

27 Some of the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters[f] and called out the entire regiment. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, “Hail! King of the Jews!” 30 And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. 31 When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

The Crucifixion

35 After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.[h] 36 Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. 37 A sign was fastened above Jesus’ head, announcing the charge against him. It read: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” 38 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

39 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. 40 “Look at you now!” they yelled at him. “You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!”

The Death of Jesus

45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. 46 At about three o’clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

47 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. 48 One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. 49 But the rest said, “Wait! Let’s see whether Elijah comes to save him.”

50 Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, 52 and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. 53 They left the cemetery after Jesus’ resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

54 The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, “This man truly was the Son of God!”

55 And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The Burial of Jesus

57 As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, 58 went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. 59 Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. 60 He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. 61 Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

The Guard at the Tomb

62 The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. 63 They told him, “Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: ‘After three days I will rise from the dead.’ 64 So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first.”

65 Pilate replied, “Take guards and secure it the best you can.” 66 So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Matthew 27:11-65 NLT

If this was the end of the story, then believers truly should be the most pitied among men. But the account doesn’t end here.

28 Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.

2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint.

5 Then the angel spoke to the women. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. 7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you.”

8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

And they did see Him…Matthew concludes his account by writing…

16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted!

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:16-20 NLT

Jesus is alive forever, our trust in Him is the only way to truly find the meaning of life abundant. Trust in Jesus to bury your meaningless struggles for the good life and you will actually find a life of rest now and forever.