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DEINITELY NOT THE LUAU

John 17:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Have you seen those lists of suggested items for your “bucket list,” things you want to do before you kick the bucket? I encountered one recently. It suggested things like visit one of the 7 wonders of the world, see the northern lights, visit New Orleans during Mardi Gras, write a book, swim in all 4 oceans, attend the Olympics, go to Disney World, record a music album, attend a luau in Hawaii, learn how to create a website, and many others.

What I found interesting was that this particular list was part of an article that also described the pros and cons of creating a bucket list. It said that having such a list provides a measurable form of progress and it makes life more meaningful. But it listed as cons that such a list can easily be superficial and, this is the big one, the fulfillment the items on the list provide is only temporary. Yeah, that is a huge downside. Do all these things and they will feel good for a moment, but then that feeling dissipates. Apparently the author failed to note the contradiction between making your life more meaningful and having the fulfillment be temporary. The problem is that whatever “meaning” you derive isn’t meaning at all. It is just some temporary good feelings. Laurie and I went to a luau once because some friends wanted to go to one with us. To be honest, for me, it didn’t even produce any particularly good feelings, but it absolutely did not make life more meaningful. I feel pretty confident if you’re looking to have your life filled with meaning by going to a luau, you’re going to be disappointed.

I’ve done a few of those things on that particular list. In addition to going to a luau I’ve been to Disney World, and wrote a book, more than one in fact. Those did not change my life. In fact, I thought about a couple of things that at one point I really wanted to do in life. One of them was when I was in college playing baseball I wanted to have a perfect day at the plate. I was not going to hit home runs, but I thought it would be really cool if I could have a day where I got a base hit every time I batted. My sophomore year I accomplished that. One game I got to the plate 4 times and got a hit every at bat. I went 4 for 4, for that day batting 1.000. Another thing I really wanted to do was to write a book. As I mentioned I did that too. Here’s what that amounted to. So what? Both of those events proved nothing and changed nothing. My miniscule baseball success was microscopically trivial, something I take zero pride in and no one else cares even a tiny bit. My novel writing accomplishments brought me nothing of real value. And, by the way, as I already said the luau definitely did not change my life.

What is it we really want to accomplish? What can we do that will have lasting meaning, fill us with passion because it is so important, enable us to feel fully alive and when our days are done will make us feel satisfied at how we have lived? Jesus pointed us in the right direction in John 17:1-4 which we are going to consider today.

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. **2**For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. **3**Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. **4**I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

EXPOSITION

JESUS ASKED THE FATHER TO GLORIFY HIM

1. This chapter is Jesus’ longest recorded prayer. The night before Jesus was arrested and ultimately executed, he spent extended time with his disciples. John recorded what he told them in John 13-17. He closed that momentous time by praying. John 17 tells us what he prayed. Jesus began by praying for himself, which we see in the first 5 verses of the chapter. The rest of his prayer was on behalf of his followers.
2. Jesus’ prayer for himself had one clear theme. In verse 1 he asked, “Glorify your Son.” Again at the end we see the same thing in verse 5 where Jesus prayed, “Father glorify me in your presence.” At first glance it might seem strange that Jesus would ask the Father to glorify him. It sounds like he wants to get notice and acclaim, to be honored. That might feel to us like it’s a little self centered. “Hey, Father, glorify me so everybody will think I’m great.” That sounds like grandstanding to us, and most of us find that to be unappealing at best. But that’s not what Jesus meant at all.
3. The late pastor and author, Ray Stedman, wrote that the word glorified means to manifest hidden values and character. So Jesus was actually asking the Father to reveal the truth about Jesus’ identity and character. That is rather different than what could sound like self aggrandizement. Jesus was not saying he wanted big honor and glory, he was saying he wanted the truth about him to be revealed. That is a different slant on this prayer. There are two significant truths that seriously change how we think about what Jesus prayed here.
4. One important truth can be understood by grasping exactly how Jesus’ character was going to be revealed. It is crucial to take note of the first words of Jesus’ prayer. “Father, the hour has come.” Back in John 2 at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry his mother had asked him to do something dramatic to help some friends who had run into a problem at their wedding. In verse 4 Jesus responded to her, “My hour has not yet come.” Jesus knew from the very beginning that there was a time for him to be revealed in a particular way. In John 12:23 Jesus had said to his disciples, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Hey, great, the time had come. Well, yes, great in one way, but not in another. In that context a few verses later Jesus said in verse 27, “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”
5. He was troubled because the way Jesus’ character and identity were going to be finally and thoroughly revealed was by being tortured and killed, then conquering death. His heart was troubled because he knew how horrific the experience was going to be. When Jesus prayed and asked the Father to glorify him, he was stating his commitment to carry out the plan. He was submitting to the plan for him to die on behalf of fallen people, to take their guilt and punishment on himself and experience the horror that went with that.
6. Saying, “I’m ready to go through with this plan to have the truth about me revealed through an excruciating death and subsequence resurrection” is very different that saying, “Hey, look at me. Have everybody give me glory.”
7. No one, without hindsight, would have ever considered being executed on a cross to be a thing of glory. It seems paradoxical for Jesus to be referring to dying on a cross as the time for him to be glorified. Dying on the cross was horrifying, but also totally degrading and shameful, not glorifying. However, in Jesus’ case it was a thing of the most profound glory ever displayed.
8. I know you’ll be surprised by this, but as I was thinking about this passage I reflected on football quarterbacks. My reflections were sparked by reading an article in which the author, a quarterback guru, analyzed the top college QB’s that will be available in April’s NFL draft. He identified strengths for each one, but then also found a potential weakness in each one of them. An NFL quarterback must possess an unusual array of skills, including intelligence and an ability to understand and execute an offense, leadership, good footwork, a strong arm, accuracy, pocket awareness, mobility, toughness, vision, anticipation, an ability to read defenses and adapt and others in order to be highly successful. No one has all of those perfectly, so which of them is most important? Will a given player’s flaw in one area be fatal so he can’t do the job? NFL teams study quarterbacks obsessively. They put them under a microscope and practically dig down to the cellular level in an effort to decipher the code of whether a given player has what it takes to be a franchise quarterback in that league, because it is generally a given that in the NFL you can’t win a championship without an elite quarterback. There have been many guys who looked like gold in college, but who flame out in the NFL. There have been a few who look pretty good in college but seem to have question marks, who turn out to be sensational, Tom Brady is the prime example, but Pat Mahomes is another. In the end, there’s only one way to know how good a quarterback will be. He plays games in the NFL where the level of play is intense and incredibly complicated and fast. He must get in the crucible of the toughest football competition in the world, and it is in that test that the truth about him is revealed. For the best, it brings them glory.
9. It’s kind of ridiculous to use an athletic competition as an analogy for the monumental thing Jesus did. But there is a principle that is at least a bit parallel. The horrible test of the cross ultimately revealed Jesus’J character and showed it to be glorious. Jesus’ death and resurrection would reveal him to be loving beyond our comprehension because he was willing to sacrifice to that extent to save us. It showed him to be faithful to the Father no matter what it took. It would also reveal him to be God in human form when he demonstrated his power by defeating death.
10. A second truth that is important to observe can be seen in what he says after asking the Father to glorify him. “So that your Son may glorify you.” The reason Jesus wanted the truth about him to be revealed was that the revelation of his character and identity would also reveal the nature of his Father, and thus bring him honor. It would show the Father to be unconditionally loving, full of grace beyond human competition, possessing wisdom only God can have, powerful over death, and able to control even his enemies. In other words, Jesus’ nature being revealed wasn’t about him ultimately, it was about the glory of the Father.
11. That is all helpful information, but so what? What application does that have to our lives today? What we see in Jesus has an implicit challenge for us. Jesus’ commitment to carrying out a plan that involved inconceivable suffering, loss and sacrifice for him calls on us to follow his example. Jesus was utterly committed to bring glory to the Father, and he could do that only by faithfully carrying out the Father’s will regardless of the cost. His example calls on us to do the same.
12. Have you ever heard the term “drip pricing”? You’ve experienced it even if you don’t know it. One of the places I have experienced it is in food delivery. What a cool thing that you can go on line, put in an order for food from a restaurant you like, and a half hour or 45 minutes later the meal shows up at your doorstep, ready to eat in the comfort of your home. It’s a great thing, but the catch is the drip pricing. Even when I know it’s coming I am dismayed by the fact that I can see the prices of the food on line and figure the total cost, but it ends up considerably more expensive that I expected. Somehow various fees, tips and taxes are added in and what you were expecting to cost $40 is actually $60. Another place drip pricing shows up is when you rent a car. They tell you this particular car is $30 a day. Great, rent it for 3 days and it will be $90, right? Then you see the actual cost and it’s $250! What happened? Hidden fees and taxes drive the price up to an appalling extent. Have you stayed at a hotel and encountered a “resort fee”? Oh, yes, plus parking, other fees and taxes. Your bargain deal where you got a room for $300 a night suddenly costs $450 a night. That’s drip pricing.
13. God does not do drip pricing. He doesn’t paint a rosy picture of what it will mean to obey him and do his will, then when you actually begin to do it suddenly he springs some terrible cost on you. He tells you what the true cost is going to be right up front. He displayed it in Jesus.
14. The price might seem too high to us and cause us to balk at staying committed to the Father’s plan. In a letter to a friend back in 1933, C. S. Lewis used the illustration of walking a dog to help us with this. He imagined walking a dog on a leash through a turnstile. He said it is common for the dog to try to go through the wrong side of the turnstile which will get the leash all hung up. So you have to pull the dog back. Lewis said, “You pull the dog back because you want to enable him to go forward. He wants exactly the same thing, namely, to go forward. For that very reason he resists your pull back, or, if he is an obedient dog yields to it reluctantly as a matter of duty, which seems to him to be quite in opposition to his own will, though in fact it is only by yielding to you that he will ever succeed in getting where he wants to go.”

JESUS HAS AUTHORITY TO GIVE ETERNAL LIFE

1. In verse 2 Jesus pointed out that the Father had given him the authority to give eternal life. That is a crucial part of his message. By believing in him we can receive eternal life. That most famous Bible verse, John 3:16 says, “God so love the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus didn’t come to condemn people, but to give them life.
2. But then in verse 3 Jesus made a startling and often ignored statement. “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” What exactly is eternal life? Jesus claimed it consists of knowing God. We typically think of eternal life to mean we will go to heaven when we die and experience life after death. It does include that, but it is broader than that.
3. Eternal life has both a quantitative and a qualitative aspect to it. Yes, it means life without end. This is something we can’t really comprehend. When we think of life going on and on without ever ending, we kind of hit a wall. We can’t really imagine what that would be like. Yet that is what God promises us in Jesus. Endless life is that quantitative aspect of eternal life, one that is a dream come true.
4. But as used in the Bible eternal life isn’t just about duration. It is living forever in a particular way. It has a special quality to it. We get a glimpse of that in John 10. In verse 28, speaking of those who believe in him, Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” That defines eternal life as life without perishing, without end. But in verse 10 Jesus had said something else about the life he came to give. He said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” This is the life he came to give. Yes, it goes on without end, but it is also the fullest possible life.
5. I think of it sometimes as “kingdom life.” As soon as you say “eternal life” my mind goes directly to unending life. Life beyond death. But this life has a quality. It is full because it is the kind of life one will experience in God’s kingdom. In that kingdom there will be no evil, no suffering, no fear. It is a place ruled by love and characterized by joy and peace.
6. John also wrote some letters in addition to his biography of Jesus. In one of them, 1 John, he wrote in 5:11-12, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life.” Note the tenses of the verbs. God has given us eternal life. That’s a perfect tense, meaning it is something that happened in the past but has effects continuing in the present and future. God has given us eternal life. It already happened. Some might say, “Well, yes, that means that when Christ did his work for us God gave us the right to have eternal life.” Except what tense does he use when speaking of getting that life? It is present tense. Whoever has the Son, right now, has the life, right now. Well, yes, I have it, but it’s like having an inheritance. It’s mine right now, but I may not actually possess it. In one sense that is true, but remember Jesus said he came that we might have life to the full. Not some day, but now. If you have the Son, you have the life.
7. We often struggle with this because much of the time it doesn’t feel like we have the kingdom life right now. I’m not controlled by love. My immediate reaction to people who tick me off is not one of love. I don’t have complete peace and I’m not characterized by constant joy. I wish I were, but I don’t live like I’m in God’s perfect kingdom right this minute. So in what sense do I have this kingdom life?
8. I have always had a little techie aspect to my character. Early on when I was in college I learned how to program computers. This was back in medieval times when programming a computer meant learning Fortran, the first one I learned, or some other ancient programming language, and the machines were behemoths that had their own buildings. I was an early adopter when personal computers came out. I actually owned and used a Kaypro computer before IBM had a PC or Apple ever had a Mac. This dismays me because honestly, I have fallen way behind when it comes to current technology. A mundane example is my cell phone. Do you know what I use it for mostly? I use it as a phone or a platform to send texts. Occasionally I use it as a camera. But my phone can do so much more than I use it for. I counted. I have 48 apps on my phone. I use about 12 of them. I never use 3 quarters of them. Much worse, the app store has thousands of apps, and I don’t use any of them. There’s all this power and I barely scratch the surface of it.
9. And so it often is with the kingdom of life that we have in Christ. We don’t realize what it can do. We don’t know what it actually consists of and how to employ it, so we go muddling through life the best we know how, knowing somehow there ought to be more to this.
10. Think carefully about that statement that Jesus made. This is eternal life. This is kingdom life. Knowing God and Jesus Christ his Son. I suspect most of us understand that to mean the way we have that life is to know God. And that is true. As I mentioned John wrote in 1 John 5:11-12 that the person who has the Son, Christ, has the life. The way we get both this quantity and the quality of kingdom life is by knowing God through Jesus. But what Jesus said means more than that.
11. Jesus said knowing God is the life. In other words, kingdom life consists of knowing God. Knowing God is what produces and makes up the kingdom life, the life we all long for. ***To know God is to live that life***.
12. As I thought about this I realized something that actually is fairly obvious. The part of our lives that involves knowing God, is the part that will last eternally. Whatever we do that is not about knowing God is not going to last eternally.
13. Laurie and I have had personal friends who have had some level of fame because they have done things our culture considers noteworthy. Our of our friends played baseball in the Major Leagues for 13 years and was part of 2 World Series Championship teams. Another friend was an All American football player in college and went on to have a successful NFL career where he was an all pro. Yet another was inducted into the San Diego Chargers hall of fame. Two friends were highly successful authors who have each sold millions of books. Two other friends started businesses that became huge successes worth many millions of dollars. These are all accomplishments that I have never had the ability to get anywhere close to achieving. But none of those things involve knowing God. It’s not that they are antithetical to knowing God. My friends all did those things while knowing God. But the achievements themselves aren’t about knowing God necessarily. So they will not last into eternity. Mostly their achievements are fine things, admirable things, but when this world ends, they will be gone forever.
14. Knowing God will infuse and inform whatever things we do. We need to be careful not to make a division of life into the secular, which is not eternal, and the spiritual, which is. It should all be driven by and formed by knowing God, as has been the case with all my friends and the things they’ve done.
15. There is a principle that is crucially important for us to know. If something cannot produce the quantity of kingdom life, meaning life without end, then it won’t be able to produce the quality of kingdom life either. So we must ask, what in life can produce life without end? There are a number of groups feverishly researching that question right now, trying to find a cure for aging and death. They are hoping that science can somehow find a solution to the problem of death and can give us life without end. Is anyone surprised they have not been successful? The things that people pursue with persistent determination, achievement, success, popularity, fame, power, money, pleasure, can never give us eternal life. We need to connect the dots. Life without end and the quality of kingdom life, a life of love, joy, peace, fullness and satisfaction, are one and the same. If something cannot give us one aspect, it can’t give the other either. So all those things we pursue hoping they will give us that fullness of life will inevitably fail.
16. Jesus claimed in these verses that kingdom life, life that lasts forever, life that is full of joy, peace, love and satisfaction, comes only from knowing God through him. To know God is to experience that life. Our world absolutely rejects that claim. But then it turns to all manner of pursuits to try to get that kingdom quality of life. As a result it gets neither the quantity of life Jesus promised, eternal life, nor the quality of kingdom life. The same will be true for us. We have eternal life in Christ, but we will only experience kingdom life to the degree that we know God.
17. Can it really be true that knowing God is the very essence of the life that every human longs for deep inside? Again I will quote the late Ray Stedman. He said, “Through my own lifetime I have come to learn that God is the most exciting Being there is. It is the world that is filled with boredom, loneliness and misery…When you walk with God every day is an adventure. He is innovative, imaginative and creative.”
18. In his book, *Wasting Time With God*, seminary professor Klaus Issler, who actually was a friend of mine 50 years ago, wrote, “What is it like to be friends with God? Bring to mind all of the good times you have had in the company of your friends, sipping coffee at an outdoor café, shopping till you drop at the mall, playing pickup basketball, sharing intimate secrets and on and on. Take all these moments, feelings and memories, wrap them up together, multiply them a thousand times, and then we might *begin* to get an idea of what friendship with God is like. It is the best of the best, the cream of the crop. It is worth more than anything we could ever own or accomplish on our own.”
19. Knowing God means a lot more than having information about God. Consider for a moment actor Denzel Washington. I know quite a bit about him. I know he is a few years younger than me. I know he is originally from New York. I know he was declared the best actor of the 21st century by *The New York Times*, has won 2 Academy Awards among many other awards. I know he has been married for 40 years and has 4 children with his wife. I know he is a believer in Jesus who has thought about becoming a pastor. So I know some things about him, but I don’t actually know him. I don’t have a relationship with him at all. I have little idea what he is actually like as a person, and the way he behaves and thinks is unknown to me and has no bearing on my life.
20. Compare that with how I know my wife, Laurie. I have a relationship with her that touches on everything I think and do. I don’t just know about her, I know her. I have a pretty good idea what she thinks about things and can predict pretty accurately how she will behave in any given situation. My relationship with her has a huge impact on decisions I make, on how I feel about things, on my priorities and values. Knowing her causes me enormous joy and brings great peace, to say nothing of laughter. When something happens in my life, whether good or bad, the first thing I want to do is share it with her. I want to know how she thinks I should respond to events in my life. I want to make her happy if I can possibly do so, and I never want to make her unhappy.
21. Knowing God means something similar to that. It means I have a good idea how he thinks about things and what he will do. It means my relationship with God will have huge impact on my choices and it will affect how I feel about things. It will determine my priorities and my valuers. It will bring me great joy and peace. I will want to share everything that happens in my life with him, and I will want to know how he wants me to respond to events in my life. I will want to please him more than anything else, and I will never want to displease him.

CONCLUSION

I am never going to know Denzel Washington. I can learn some things about him. I could even try to become an expert on all things Denzel Washington. But I will never know him because in order for that to happen he would have to want to have a relationship with me. He could care less about that. The only way to have a relationship with someone is if they want to have a relationship and choose to reveal themselves to that person.

A week or so ago one day Laurie said to me, “I broke the law yesterday.” I immediately thought, “Okay, this should be good.” She proceeded to tell me that she was driving home from Encinitas late in the afternoon. There was a lot of traffic. She needed to turn left onto the freeway on ramp off Encinitas Boulevard. Unfortunately, there were so many cars ahead of her that when she tried to turn left she got stopped in the middle of the intersection. As she was sitting there unable to go forward the traffic signal changed so that cars started coming west into the intersection. She was in a difficult spot. She couldn’t back up. She couldn’t go forward, and if she just stayed there she would block traffic coming from the other direction. She didn’t know what to do. She could see only one solution. The diamond lane on the on ramp was wide open. Even though she was the only person in the car she decided the only way she could get out of the way of oncoming traffic was to take that lane. Then she told me that because she had a child’s car seat in the back, she turned several times and looked back at it and made it look like she was talking to a child in the car seat even though it was actually empty. In other words, she tried to make it appear that because there was a kid in the car seat she wasn’t alone in the car, thus not breaking the law. That story did a couple of things for me. It made me laugh. But it also made me admire Laurie all the more. Most people probably wouldn’t tell that story because it would not be something they would be proud of. But what I can tell you about Laurie is that she is honest and genuine almost to a fault, if that can even be a fault. She is secure and quick to laugh at her own foibles. And she wants to share everything with me, even things she might not be proud of. Having a relationship with her brings me so much happiness. And God is even better than Laurie. He won’t have the funny stories I often get from Laurie, but there will be joy and peace.

The astounding news is that God desires a relationship with us. He has chosen to pursue us and to reveal himself to us. The only way you get to know a person is to listen, to pay attention when they reveal themselves to you.

So if you want to know God through Jesus, listen to him. He reveals himself to us through the Bible. Listen to what he says. Then, just like any relationship, live in fellowship with him. The more you are with him each day, the more you will know him. We will experience kingdom life to the degree that we know God. If we don’t live continually in relationship with him we will fail to have that life.