

‘What’s the point of it all?’

A man goes to his doctor with a complaint. The doctor examines him and gives the man a prescription. The following week the man returns, still complaining of feeling unwell, so the doctor gives him a prescription for some antibiotics. Next week the man is back again still complaining, this time the doctor gives him a powerful injection. For the fourth week in a row, the man is back at the doctor. The doctor says to him: “Go home, open all the windows in your house and have the hottest bath you can stand. Then stand in front of one of the open windows for an hour.” The man says: “Hey, if I do that, I’ll catch pneumonia.” And the doctor says: “Yes, but I can cure pneumonia.”

We all know what it seems like to struggle with problems, where it seems that everything we are doing is just futile. And you think to yourself: “What’s the point of it all?” Doctors must feel like that. They just start successfully treating an age-old disease, then suddenly they are faced with a new one and the research for a cure starts all over again.

Or people who work at trying to resolve conflicts around the world. They stop two nations fighting in one part of the world and just as soon as they have achieved that, a new conflict breaks out somewhere else and they have to start all over again.

What about world economies? We hear politicians telling us that we are in a period of economic stability and then suddenly, there’s a slump in the stock market, interest rates go up and we’re going through another period of boom and bust. No matter how hard movie stars try to keep their looks, even artificially with plastic surgery and fad diets, in the final analysis, they will get old just the same as us and eventually their bodies will return to dust.

You see, we live in a world in bondage to frustration and that’s exactly how the Bible describes it; however, there is a uniquely Christian viewpoint that keeps us from being frustrated by world filled with frustration. **Romans 8:18-25** “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

What Paul is saying is that in this world that is filled with frustration, there is a group of people, called Christians, living with hope. They’re not frustrated by all the frustration. And if you look at it in the **New American Standard Version** it says in **Romans 8:20**, “That the creation was subject to futility”.

How can we live with hope, if everything around us seems subject to futility? It’s as simple as this. We believe at Calvary, futility was destroyed and that’s what this message is about today, futility for Christians was destroyed at the cross and replaced with hope.

Firstly, let’s start with this whole idea that creation is in bondage to decay. Paul is saying in **Romans 8:20** “The curse resulted in creation being subjected to futility”. He knows that the entire creation is currently in bondage to decay. It doesn’t matter if it’s the smallest flower, the highest mountain or the furthest planet; it is all, right now, subject to decay. The universe was created to glorify God and it does glorify God, but Paul says not as fully as it was intended to. There is a lack of perfection in creation and Paul says it was all the fault of man, God’s highest creation, because man refused to give glory to God and that’s a very important point we need to grasp on to.

Is Paul then saying that God ordained creation to be subject to futility? Absolutely! And this is the reason why. It’s because after man had sinned and went against God, God wanted creation to reflect what man is like when he ignores his creator. **Romans 1:20-21** “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

In **verse 21** notice that Paul uses the word “futile”. He is using it in the context of aimlessness, pointlessness; vanity, lacking reality, something that leads to no end.

He is saying that rebellion against God has caused life for most people on this planet to merely be a pointless existence. That when you take God out of life, then you take meaning out of life and so Paul says there is a certain meaninglessness that just seems to pierce all of creation. You see if you reject God, then how do you answer the question that is inevitably going to crop up in every single person's life and that question is this one: "What's the point of it all?"

And that's a hard question and that's why a lot of people ignore it, by staying busy in other activities. By trying to stay busy with their work or with their materialism, so that they don't have to deal with that question. But no matter how hard they try to get away from it, that question keeps cropping up over and over again: "What's the point of it all?" And if you don't have God in your life, how do you answer the question of "What's the point of it all?" And the answer is simple, you can't.

Because if there is no God, there is ultimately no point and if life doesn't have an ultimate meaning, you're going to be faced with another question: "What does it matter what you do?" If there's no point, if there's no reason, if there's no ultimate reality for why you even take up space on this planet, then what does it matter what you do? We live in a culture that has raised the white flag and surrendered to the fact that it can't answer those questions. It's not just our modern culture that thinks like that.

Dr Robert Oppenheimer, the father of modern nuclear weapons, just before he died said this: "My life has been a complete failure." Then when he was reminded of the great things he had achieved, Oppenheimer said this: "No, they just leave on the tongue, the taste of dust."

Then the great British Parliamentarian, Sir Leonard Wolf said this: "I see clearly that I have achieved practically nothing. The world and the history of human anthill during the last 57 years, would be exactly the same as it is, if I had played ping pong, instead of sitting on committees and writing books and memoranda. I have therefore to make the rather ignominious confession to myself and to anyone who may read this book, that I must have in a long life, ground through between 150,000 and 200,000 hours of perfectly useless work."

Clarence Darrell a lawyer summed up his life with Luke 5:5 "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything."

How would you like that to be the verse that sums up your life? This world is subjected to futility, but Paul says, frustration and the futility will not have the last word. He says the creation waits, he says the creation is groaning and then he says, we are groaning too. Deep down in our spirits we are groaning for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. He's insisting that something has happened that gives some of us hope in a world subjected to futility and we believe that something was the work of Jesus Christ.

In fact, notice Paul says the atonement was so powerful; it had effects on the entire universe. What Paul was saying is just like when man sinned, his sin affected the whole creation and likewise his redemption is going to affect the whole creation. We don't have full redemption yet. We've been redeemed from our sins; we have redemption of our souls. We're waiting for the redemption of our bodies, we live with hope believing something happened in Jesus Christ that spelled the end of futility.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:18-19 "Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

When Jesus went to the cross He purchased many things. He purchased salvation from sin. He purchased salvation from bondage. He purchased salvation from hopelessness. But what we are thinking about today is, Paul said Christ purchased our salvation from futility. That means because of the cross our wisdom no longer has to be futile.

You see, the Scriptures constantly depicts God mocking the wisdom of this world. This world as you know is full of wise men, sages and philosophers. They fill up daytime TV and radio shows, they have columns in newspapers and they tell us about all the problems in this world. These people are usually highly educated and very intelligent and they do a fairly good job of telling us of what all the problems of the world are.

They see the lack of peace. They see the hunger and the poverty. They see broken families. They see racial tension.

And they are extremely good at telling us what all the problems are, but have you noticed that the wisdom of the world doesn't seem to be solving many of these problems. The problem with the wisdom of the world is that it is wonderful if you want to know what the problems are, but the wisdom of the world can't deal with the thing that is causing all the problems, and that is the sin of man.

That's why Paul says, when we went to the cross, we discovered real wisdom in Jesus Christ. God doesn't think much of the wisdom of the world. **1 Corinthians 3:19-20 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God". As it says in the book of Job, "God uses man's own brilliance to trap him; he stumbles over his own wisdom and falls". And again, in the book of Psalms, we are told that "the Lord knows full well how the human mind reasons and how foolish and futile it is".**

Ephesians 4:17 "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts".

We don't live that way anymore. Our wisdom doesn't have to be futile anymore. We found true wisdom when we went to the cross. **1 Corinthians 1:23-24 "But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God".**

We didn't just get salvation at the cross, we received wisdom. We have a new way to think now and it isn't futile. For example, **what's the wisdom of the world when it comes to marriage?** The wisdom of the world says that in a marriage you must fulfil your own dreams, you must put yourself first and only then can you truly love somebody and hey, if it doesn't work out, get a divorce. The wisdom of the cross says, you must submit to each other, you must sacrifice for each other like Christ did for the church and that marriage is not something to be entered into lightly, it is something for life. Two, totally different wisdom's. And the question is **which wisdom makes the best marriage?**

When it comes to sexuality, the wisdom of the world says, throw off all your inhibitions. Be free to explore whatever you want to explore, with whom you want to explore and hey, if you catch a disease get some antibiotics or if you get pregnant, it's your body, get rid of the inconvenience. Once you've done all that and had multiple partners, only then will you have found your true inner self and you can settle down with one person.

The wisdom of the cross says no. Your body belongs to God, you were bought at a price and you need to honour God by being pure and not sleeping around, having sex out with marriage! **Which wisdom has been the biggest blessing to this society?**

The wisdom of the world says if somebody hurts you, you hurt them right back and do it harder by taking them to court and sue them for everything they have, because you've got to stand up for your rights! The wisdom of the cross says, if anyone has a grievance against you or if you against anybody, you bear it and you forgive them, because that's exactly what God did for you, when he had a lot more against you.

Both sides think the other side thinks foolishly and what you've got to decide is Christ crucified true wisdom, or **are you going to think in the wisdom of the world?** Paul says, that if you think in the wisdom of the world, you're thinking is futile. You're good at finding problems, but you're not good at solving them.

One of the greatest blessings of the cross is that the Christian is now able to think meaningfully, we can see through the deceptions of this age and live with true wisdom. Paul says our worship no longer has to be futile. We should be as distressed as the apostle Paul was when we see people who are worshipping gods who cannot deliver.

In **Athens**, Paul came across a place filled with idols and his heart was distressed. Because here was a city full of people who thought they were wise and they are worshipping gods who cannot deliver. Their worship was futile. Even earlier in **Acts**, Paul and Barnabas went into the town of Lystra and they healed a lame man.

The people in their own language start saying that the gods are visiting them and when Paul and Barnabas finally figure out what's going on, they say in **Acts 14:15 "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them."** Paul was telling them that God had sent them into the world to tell them to turn to the true God and stop their futile worshipping.

You know what? The Christian faith is a politically incorrect faith, because what we are saying is this. If Jesus is who He claimed to be, if He's really the Son of God, if He really went to a cross and if He was really raised from the dead, then all the other religions of the world are futile. And if Jesus was a fake, then our faith is futile.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19 "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men".

It's the very message of hope that we should be taking to the people inside and outside of this building, who are worshipping god's who can't deliver. The only thing that could possibly be worse than that is to watch people worship the true God in a futile way. And that happens too. We do that when we try to do what Jesus did for us. When we try to pay the sin debt ourselves. There are Christians who believe if they do just enough good works, then that will guarantee them an entry into heaven.

And there are Christians who still believe that God will judge us with a set of scales. On one side will be all the good things we have done and on the other, all the bad things and depending which side weighs the heaviest, will determine where we will spend eternity. If that's how you get to heaven, it's pointless.

1 Peter 1:18-19 "God paid a ransom to save you from the impossible road to heaven which your fathers tried to take, and the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver, as you very well know. But he paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God".

Paul says we don't have to live frustrated in a frustrated world. The cross has ended futility and we can be delivered from a futile way of thinking and we can be delivered from a futile way of worshipping. And the cross means our way of life no longer has to be futile.

A man was out walking his dog in the park when he noticed two council workmen. One was digging a hole and as soon as he had dug it, the other worker filled it in again. He watched them doing this for half an hour. Then eventually he got mad, thinking his council tax was being wasted, and he went over to them and asked what they were doing. They said, "They were part of a three-man tree planting team, but the guy that plants the trees had phoned in sick".

Have you ever felt that way about your job? You're just working to work and there's no point to it. Just like lemmings. Every so often these small animals make a mad dash for the sea, climbing over everything and anything in their way until they get to a cliff and what do they do? They keep on running, right over the cliff and into the water and drown.

Is that all there is to life? We don't want to believe that, so what we do is this, we stay busy. Stay busy at work. Stay busy with our hobbies. We even stay busy with our sins. To try to ignore the fact, that our lives don't have much meaning. But there's that question in our minds again, we just can't get away from it, **what's the point of it all?**

You know, there's something worse than dying, and that is never ever knowing why you lived. One of the most painful days in your life and ultimately one of the best is when you look at yourself in the mirror and say: "I don't have a reason, there's got to be more than this."

This is a true story. A young man became rebellious and started drinking and turned against God. On the day of his high school graduation, he and his best friend were sitting in a supermarket car park drinking beer. After finishing his sixth can, he looked at his friend and said: "There's got to be something more to life than this." On reflection, in later life, he felt it was God giving him a nudge. Anyway, he went on to a Christian college and it was there that a college teacher helped this young man, **Max Lucado**, rediscover his faith. He said the turning point in his life was sitting drunk in a car park saying: "There's got to be more to life than this."

The thing is, we don't just waste life with booze and drugs, sometimes we waste life getting pay cheques. **Lee Strobel** an American journalist was determined to get to the top of his profession and was sacrificing everything to get there. One day he had to research a story. So he went to the newspaper news library and found the drawer that contained all the stories he had ever written. As he stared at the drawer full of yellowing, ageing, brittle stories, it suddenly dawned on him that this was what he was killing himself for. He was trading his life for a drawer full of newspaper clippings.

Strobel who was an atheist went on to become a Christian and wrote a book called: “The Case for Faith: A journalist investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity.”

But let me ask you this, **what are you trading your life for?** The world says life is meaningless and goes nowhere. There is no point to life so it doesn't matter what you do. The Christian stands up and says: “**I'm sorry, I've been to the cross and I'm going to refute that statement. Life does have a point. Life does go somewhere. The precious blood of Jesus, shed on a cross 2000 years ago, has ransomed me from the empty way of life handed down to me from my ancestors.**”

When you earnestly live out your faith, you do not find that life is futile. You find that life is meaningful and that you are here for a reason. **Matthew 16:25 “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”** Jesus says if you spend your life trying to save your life, if you spend your life trying to amass and build up and make your life sweeter, all you're ultimately going to do, is waste your time on this planet.

But when you lose your life for a cause bigger than yourself, called Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, you find life rich and meaningful. And what you find out when you do something for Jesus, even if it's a cup of cold water, if you do it for Jesus, it lasts forever. How tragic that God in His grace would give us **30, 40, 80 years** to live on this earth and all that we can do in that time is build up an empire.

An empire that is going to burn up when Jesus returns and we have nothing to show that is going to last forever. We believe life does have meaning, there's a point and there's a reason for us being here. **1 Corinthians 15:58 “So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted as it would be if there were no resurrection.”**

We've been to the cross. We've seen Jesus die for our sins, taking our place and when we walk away, we know we have a future. We live with hope; we know we are not going to be frustrated by frustration, because our lives have meaning now. The cross has done away with futility. Each and every day you have to make a choice. You have to decide what is futile and what is final. Satan will try to distract you, to get you in line with the rest of the lemmings, so that you stay busy, wasting your life and you'll have a lot of company.

In between flights, a man went into an airport amusement arcade and began playing the machines. While he was busy saving the universe from marauding aliens, a thief made off with his briefcase containing £50,000. You see you have to be careful that while you are busy trying to win the game; you are losing something that really matters. And there are really only two things that really do matter.

Love God with everything you've got now and love your neighbour just as hard. This coming week you will have numerous chances to decide what is futile and what is final. And if you start each day going to the cross, you will choose well.