

Use and The Lord's Purpose Sermon

By Rev. Pearse Frazier

The following sermon was preached from an outline, and not read as a script. This is a rough transcript that may have some errors. In addition, at the end, is a copy of the family talk which is intended as a companion piece, best read first.

If you get nothing else out of today's sermon, I would hope that what you get is that it would be useful for you to read the Gospel of Luke, chapter 6, on its own in one sitting. It would take you about 10 minutes if read slowly out loud. And it is better than what else we will say.

That said, what is the point? What's the point of it all? You could say, what's the meaning of life? Or you could say, why are you created? Or you could say, why did you come to church? What's the point of anything?

The heavenly doctrines for the New Church actually give us an answer. And that answer is a heaven from the human race. That is the ultimate, final end of everything. In fact, it is so much the final end and point of everything that it's why the Lord permits evil. It's why the Lord gives you freedom and rationality. It's why the Lord has created marriage, the church, given us His Word. It's why He's given us the illusion that we can do things of our own self, even though we may recognize that it is from the Lord. It's the reason why anything is either permitted, created, or happens at all: so that there can be a heaven from the human race, or what is the same, an angelic heaven.

We have to be careful with these words, though, and understand them very clearly. And so we're going to break this concept down to really examine what it actually means and apply it to some basic understandings.

First, use. Use is something that many people in the General Church and in the New Church, and even in society, celebrate. Sometimes even worship. You might even say, "Well, that person's really useful." Or you might publish a book called *Education for Use*. Or, "What's the point of life? To be useful."

But wait a minute. That's not actually true, is it? That wasn't the point of life. The point of life was a heaven from the human race.

Use is something that is in service to an end. There are useful ends, but they are all in service to the final end, or the ultimate point of creation. Which means when someone says, "That looks useful," the very simple question everyone should ask is, "Useful for what? How is it useful?" Because use is not the point of life. Use is how it comes into effect. The point is a heaven from the human race.

Now, elsewhere in the Heavenly Doctrine, we are taught that heaven is not some geographic location far, far away. That the kingdom of heaven is within. That it is the states of happiness and peace we feel when, as a group or a community or a kingdom, we feel the Lord's love by loving others. Heaven is the state of happiness and peace when love is fulfilled.

So when the Lord is thinking about the purpose of something, He's thinking about how He can love you. And as a result, you can love others. And as a result, you and others can feel happiness and peace. That's what the Lord wants from you. He wants you to feel eternal happiness and peace. And He wants you to love others and receive His love.

So when we talk about what is use, we can say, "Is it helping us love others? Is it helping us give them peace and joy, true happiness and peace? Is it helping us love the neighbor and love the Lord? Is it helping us create a community of people in that love?" And if the answer is yes, it's useful.

Now, at another time, in another place, we could have an entire sermon about how evil can be useful, because the Lord is able to bend all things that He permits toward that useful end. But we are also taught that people who are in evil do not experience the happiness and peace that comes from love. So, just for us today, we'll focus on the positive. How do you feel happiness and peace? And, more importantly, how do you help others?

So we're going to look at life. Life can be broken down into four basic parts: shunning evil, your daily occupation, extras or benefactions, and then recreations. And we are taught that any aspect of the good life can be

compartmentalized into one of these parts. And we're going to go through a few of them right now.

First we'll start with worship. External, formal worship. What you're doing here now. What part of the good life, the life of charity, is that? It is recreation. It is the fourth of charity. It is getting ready. It's like taking a bath or brushing your teeth or eating healthily. It's like relaxing. Hence, it's part of a good Sabbath, the day of rest.

We are taught that external worship is necessary but not sufficient. And when we think about it as part of the fourth aspect of charity, that begins to make sense. But it is also useful. It is useful, obviously, to take care of your health. Because if you can't take care of your health, how are you going to be useful to anyone else? But the same is true with your spiritual health and your worshipful health. It's useful to go to church, not because going to church is the point, but because it prepares you for the rest of life. It gives you that rest, that reconnection with the Lord. It grounds you, just as morning routines of brushing your teeth and eating healthily and maybe taking a shower can ground you for the rest of the day.

Now one of the main things that you learn at worship is about repentance. Repentance, and all of the work that you do in your own life, again, is a little bit of four, but also one. Meaning it is a recreation, it is taking care of your health, but it is also the first of charity: shunning evils.

It is easy to see how shunning evils can be useful. The obvious example is if someone is doing work for you, maybe a craftsman or a tradesman in your house, and they are dishonest and they're lying to you about the work that needs to be done. They're not very useful to you. A chef who poisons his customers is not a useful chef. Shunning evil lets good happen.

We're taught elsewhere in the Heavenly Doctrines that man does not do good. Rather, the Lord does good through us when we shun evil. That's so very important to remember because the second aspect of a good life is daily occupation.

This is where many people fall into the biggest trap with the idea of use. They think, "Well, I'm useful when I'm doing my job." Yes, that is one of the

ways that you might be useful, inasmuch as you're doing your job honestly, justly, and faithfully. But it is not the main way that you might be useful. It's just one of the ways.

What's more, that daily occupation is not synonymous with job. And this is so important if you are a kid and you don't have a job. Or if you're 87 years old and you're stuck in bed and you don't have a job. Or the countless ways you can think of yourself as not having a job. Your job is not your use.

What's more, a lot of jobs can be productive to society, might contribute to the GDP, might contribute to the tax coffers of a kingdom or a nation-state. That's fine, as much as it's fine. And might even be mechanically useful, like fixing someone's toilet. But again, so what? To what end are any of those things good and therefore truly useful? To the degree that they help people become angels and experience heaven.

Now, if you work in the education world, you can think pretty quickly how being a good teacher helps students become angels. But think slowly about that. What's more important: that the children see you demonstrate that you have a spiritual life, that you don't do evil to them and for them, that you encourage them to have a conscience and learn about what is right and wrong, or that they get a good grade? What's more important?

Where do we as a society put our emphasis? Because it's very easy for us as natural people to say, "We have a good school because so many of our graduates are going to such great colleges." Or, "Look at our test scores. Compare them to other schools. See how good we're doing."

Who cares?

Well, actually, we might care inasmuch as it serves that ultimate end: a heaven from the human race. And yes, we can do many great things with the natural good that we might be able to do. But did you notice that the Lord has not cured cancer? Have you noticed that the Lord has not built amazing power plants all over the world to give us free energy? That the Lord doesn't even fix our toilets?

What the Lord has prioritized is giving us His truth and trying to get us to love one another. Which means all those other things that someone might be educated to do are in service to that higher love.

So think about other jobs. How can a job like a plumber or a doctor be serving an angelic kingdom? Well, one example I like: I had a friend who was a carpenter, and he came to our house. And we had a little family with a baby and a mom and dad who were very tired. And we needed a wall knocked out between the kitchen and the dining room so we could see our kids better. And he came in and knocked out that wall. And it helped us love our children better.

But the amazing thing is, talking to this person, they talked about how before they begin every job, and before they begin every job day, before they walk into the house of the customer or client, they try to pray. And they pray, "Lord, I'm doing this job for a whole host of reasons. I'm getting paid. They need this mechanical thing done. Help me love them in my work."

And when I heard that, I thought, "Lord, when I am receiving this naturally useful thing from a carpenter, help me be aware of Your love in him being shared with me."

That closes the loop. That elevates something natural, a contract between a carpenter and a family, into something heavenly. But it doesn't happen automatically. It happens with prayerful intention.

It's why it's so important to pray. Pray out loud. If you have a voice, literally say the words out loud so that your ears can hear those words. So that you can experience that connection. So that all those other natural things can be elevated to that wonder and that love.

There are many ways in our lives we can have occupations that can serve that higher love. When a woman is old and invalid and can't leave her house, can't leave her bed, she's still useful. She can be useful when someone comes to serve and help her, maybe one of the nurses that visits her daily.

And you can imagine being that kind of nurse. You have different kinds of clients. You have that one client that's probably very confused, another

client who's maybe always grumpy, and then you have that one lady who always smiles and says, "Thank you." That's the client that gives you the energy to face all the others.

A woman in that situation, when she gratefully and graciously receives love and care with gratitude and returns that love, that's not a mere benefaction or a recreation. That is her daily occupation. She is building the kingdom of heaven.

What a wonderful, beautiful thing that can be.

And I am sure in your own life you can think of a myriad ways that by doing whatever it is that you do with graciousness and with mindful prayer, you can build that kingdom. And that's just in your regular life. There will be untold opportunities, benefactions, works of goodness that you'll be able to do on top of these things. Whether it's literally feeding the hungry or clothing the naked, or just opening the door for someone, smiling to the checkout cashier, building the kingdom of heaven.

Every interaction we do can serve that end. And as they serve those ends, they are useful. They build the kingdom of heaven outside of us, with all those we interact with, and the Lord is building the kingdom of heaven within you.

In our story, the Lord came down from the mountain and stood at a level place with the crowd. In one sense, it's a shame that we preach from up high like this, when the Lord would have been down among you. Because He is down among you now.

When He raised up His eyes to look at His disciples, He encouraged them. He strengthened them. He taught them. He loved them.

And in all the useful things that you do, the Lord is with you.

Amen.

Use and The Lord's Purpose Family Talk

In our story today, which was taken from the Gospel of Luke, it begins with the Lord on a mountain. He's high up, and He's been praying all night. And He's been alone.

He comes down from the mountain, and He's with His disciples. And He comes even further down onto a level plain with the people.

Now, to give you an idea of what this might have looked like, we in the modern world have a very distorted view of public speaking. We tend to think that a public speaker looks down on people. Now, the reason why we can do that is because we have giant stone buildings or microphones with speakers. But in the ancient world, they didn't have those things. And so, if somebody was just looking down a hill at a bunch of other people and yelling at them, they wouldn't actually hear much. The acoustics are terrible.

If someone wanted to be heard, they would have to have what they would call an amphitheater, sort of like a little bowl, where behind them would be rocks or a wall. In front of them, something that could echo or bounce sound, like stone or water. And then the people would be going up.

We can't replicate that here, but that's what I'd like you to try to imagine if you were one of the Lord's disciples or part of the crowd. That He has come down and is standing on a level place. And then, as the Scripture tells us, He looks up at the disciples.

So He isn't preaching like this. He's surrounded by a crowd, and He's preaching like this. He is among the people. In fact, it would be more realistic to say that He is preaching like this, which we feel very uncomfortable about. But that is actually how the Lord preached. He spoke to the people.

In fact, in this sermon, the Lord says not, "Blessed are those who mourn," or, "Blessed are those who are poor," but He says, "Blessed are you who mourn. Blessed are you who are poor." He's making eye contact with the people. He's connecting with them. He's trying to get them where they are because He's trying to elevate them to something higher.

That's what the Lord's always trying to do with us. He's always trying to come down to where we are and pull us up, if we're willing. And that's what He's doing today and every day.

The Lord has a goal in mind. And we read about that goal. The Lord's goal is a heaven from the human race. His ultimate end, the thing that everything else is judged on and lined up in accordance with, all the other rules are for one reason only: an angelic heaven.

Now, we know in the New Church that angels are people. People who have died and who, because they love the neighbor and the Lord more than themselves, are in heaven.

So the purpose of your life is to become an angel, right? Not exactly. That's some of it. That's part of it. Because the goal is not to have a lot of angels, but to have an angelic heaven, a whole kingdom, a whole group of people that make a heavenly kingdom. Which changes the perspective.

What is your purpose in life?

And that's what the Lord is talking to the disciples especially about. He's with a large crowd of people, but the people He's looking up at and directing all of this sermon to are the disciples especially.

You can imagine twelve men who have, for various reasons, dedicated themselves to following Jesus Christ wherever He goes. And around those twelve men and the Lord is a huge crowd of people. Some of them were sick. Some of them were possessed by evil spirits. Some of them were just curious about what's going on. Some of them might be evil people, scribes and Pharisees who are out to trick the Lord. Or some might be there taking other people's names and thinking, "Oh, I better get him in trouble. He followed the Lord."

Think about all the crowd that's there. And the Lord's talking just to the disciples.

And He says so many amazing things. If I could hope for you to do one thing after this sermon, after this talk, it would be to, on your own, read the

Gospel of Luke, chapter 6, in full. It's short. It takes about seven minutes out loud, slowly. And it's beautiful.

And in it, the Lord is elevating, elevating, elevating to that higher purpose. And near the end, He concludes with, "A bad tree does not bear good fruit. And a good tree doesn't bear bad fruit. People don't go picking grapes from brambles or figs from thorns."

The Lord's telling the disciples that if they want to do the Lord's good, because that's what they're hoping to do, they're going to have to have a good heart. It's almost like a prerequisite. If you want to be useful in society, it's a prerequisite where the first thing you need to be mindful of is to not do bad.

If a hard worker is hard at work, but they lie about what they're doing, it destroys everything else. So good can only come from good.

But this creates a dilemma for the disciples. And I want you to imagine what the dilemma might be.

Imagine that you are a really good disciple. And that you're faithful, you're hardworking, you're following the Lord, you're trying your best. But do you know what else you might be? Really honest about who you are. Which means you might know that you are not perfect.

So how are you going to do anything good if you're not perfect? If the Lord says to you, "Good can't come out of a bad tree," and you think, "Yeah, but if I think about myself, am I a bad tree? Am I sometimes dishonest? Do I sometimes lose my temper? Do I sometimes do things for selfish reasons?"

The disciples were thinking, "Yes. Sometimes I do."

Yet the Lord carried them with Him, continued to lead and guide them. And they had faith in Him, trust in Him, in His ultimate purpose.

Because they didn't actually have to do the good.

And this is our final idea. The disciples weren't doing good. They were following the Lord.

And you don't have to do good. You just have to follow the Lord.

Don't worry about how useful or productive you're being in any particular moment. You don't have to accomplish amazing things. It's not about some product that you post up on the wall or that you post to Instagram so people can see how productive you are. There's no quarterly metrics review in this job.

It's about the process.

All you have to do is try. If you follow the Lord, make mistakes, but then try again, the Lord will do good through you.

And the angelic heaven that He creates isn't just that He's working on perfecting you, but that as you shun evil, and as the Lord through you does good, you share that with the Lord. You become a vessel for the Lord's goodness, His love, His truth, His church, His heaven.

That's what the disciples heard. They heard, "We can be His vessels."

And they were courageous.

Amen.

Psalms 127

A song of the ascents, of Solomon.

1

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord keeps the city,
The keeper watches in vain.

2

It is vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
Eating the bread of grief;
For so He gives to His beloved sleep.

3

Behold, children are a heritage of the Lord;
The fruit of the womb is His reward.

4

As arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior,
So are the sons of one's youth.

5

Happy is the mighty-man
Who has his quiver filled with them;
They shall not be ashamed,
For they speak with the enemies in the gate.

Luke 6:39-45

39 And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind guide the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfected trained will be like his teacher.

41 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

43 “For a good tree does not bring forth rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bring forth good fruit. 44 For every tree is known by its own fruit. For from thorns they do not gather figs, nor from a bramble do they gather a grape.

45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good; and a wicked man out of the wicked treasure of his heart brings forth that which is wicked. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Divine Love and Wisdom 329.

From the final end in creation it can be seen what a form of use is. The final end in creation is the existence of an angelic heaven. And because the angelic heaven is the final end, so, too, is mankind or the human race, since heaven is formed from it. It follows from this that all other phenomena created are intermediate ends, and that these are forms of use in the order, degree and respect that they have relation to mankind and through mankind to the Lord.

Divine Love and Wisdom 330.

Since the final end in creation is an angelic heaven from the human race, and so also the human race, therefore its intermediate ends are all other phenomena that have been created. And because these have relation to mankind, they have regard to these three constituents of a person, namely, his body, his rational faculty, and his spiritual character, for the sake of his conjunction with the Lord.

For a person cannot be conjoined with the Lord unless he is spiritual, and he cannot be spiritual without being rational, and he cannot be rational without having a body in sound condition. These three are like a house. The body is like the foundation. The person's rational faculty is like the superstructure of the house. His spiritual character is like the furnishings in the house. And conjunction with the Lord is like his inhabiting of it.

Apparent from this is the order, degree and respect in which forms of use, the intermediate ends of creation, have relation to mankind, namely, that they are for sustaining a person's body, for perfecting his rational faculty, and for his receiving a spiritual character from the Lord.