

Reading: **Ephesians 1:3-6**

INTRO. *Have you ever noticed how fascinated we are by the best & greatest things in life? There are actually books written on this, compiling lists on what people consider the greatest & best things in life. Here's one sample list I came across on the internet: The best day, **today**; The best play, **work**; The greatest puzzle, **life**; The greatest thought, **God**; The greatest mystery, **death**; The best work, **work you like**; The greatest need, **common sense**; The greatest deceiver, **the one who deceives himself**; The greatest comfort, **the knowledge that you have done your work well**; The greatest thing in the world, **love – for family, home, friends, neighbors**. You get the point. We have a fascination with the greatest & best things in life.*

Today, I'd like for us to think about another list, & that's the best & greatest things in life for the Christian. If you're a child of God, what are the greatest & best things in life for you? It's my hope that if you are a child of God, you'll agree with my list, & if you're not a Christian, you'll see why you need to be one. My list is going to include ___ things:

1st ...The greatest privilege in life...to be counted a child of God. *What could be a greater privilege than to know that God counts you as one of His own children? John wrote in **1st Jn. 3:1**, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" What a wonderful privilege to be called children (or sons) of God. Paul said in our earlier reading, **Eph. 1:4-5**: God "...chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy & blameless, before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will." You know adoption is a good thing. **Moses** was adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, **Esther** was adopted by her uncle Mordecai, & here Paul says we're adopted by God! And that's a good thing because it means **(1) God chose us**; He decided what type of children He wanted ~ "**holy & blameless**" ~ & whoever's willing to be that kind of person, God chooses him as His child. Also **(2) He claims us as His own**. Just like when you see your child doing something that pleases you, whether it's excelling in school or sports, you say, "**That's my son, that's my daughter**." You're proud to claim them as your own. In the same way, God is proud to claim us as His own when we live as He teaches us. What could be a greater privilege than this, to know that God counts*

you as His child, & that you can call on Him as your Father in Heaven, & He'll hear you?

2nd ... The greatest joy in life...is knowing yours sins are forgiven. Remember the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8? Philip is told about a man riding in his chariot down a deserted road to Gaza. So, he finds him, gets in his chariot & teaches him about Jesus. I've often wondered how long Philip's sermon was to the eunuch ~ 30 minutes? One hour? Two hours? We don't know, but it was long enough for the eunuch to learn what he had to do be saved. For when they came to some water, the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" How'd he know he needed to be baptized? Because in preaching Jesus, Philip told him how Jesus said, "He who believes & is baptized shall be saved..." (Mk. 16:16). So, Philip told him, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And the eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So, they stopped the chariot, got out, went down into the water, both Philip & the eunuch, & Philip baptized him. And the Bible says, "Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; & he went on his way rejoicing," (Acts 8:39). I imagine that was the greatest joy the Ethiopian eunuch had ever known! Why? Because now, he knew he was a new creature in Christ, he no longer had to bear the guilt of his sins, his conscience was clear, his sins were forgiven, he was in a right relationship with God & he was on his way to heaven! What greater joy could anyone experience than that?

3rd ... The greatest fellowship in life...is what we have with Christ & His church. When you obeyed the gospel to become a Christian, you entered into the greatest fellowship known to man. Paul said, in 1st Cor. 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." If you visit any congregation of God's people today, you'll see that no two persons are exactly alike. There'll be men, women, young, old, middle age...married & singles... there'll be people of different social backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, different economic backgrounds... sometimes, a congregation will have people of different cultures, different races & different nationalities. In other words, there'll be people who are poles apart in every respect. And before they come into Christ, few, if any were

saying, "**Let's get together.**" Yet, after each person comes into Christ, what happens? Suddenly, they're brought together as one; & in time, as each follows the LORD, they become one happy family! As John says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, & the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin," (1st Jn. 1:7). So, as each of us lives the Christian life, we can have a dynamic fellowship, & all our differences melt away!

Look at the apostles! Among the apostles, there was a man named **Simon the Zealot**, & there was a man named **Matthew**. These men were as different as any could be! Both were Jews, but Simon was zealously opposed to the ways of the Romans; he wanted nothing to do with the Roman government. Yet, Matthew was a publican, a tax collector! He worked for the Roman government! So, you can be sure these two men never ran together in the same circles. Neither man said, "**I believe I'll get with him.**" That wasn't in their thinking! They were natural enemies! But, on the day each found Jesus, they found each other. And since each wanted Christ, & what He offers, they had to take each other, & accept their differences! And that's how it is in the church! When we accept Christ, we accept each other with all our faults & failures! All of our differences suddenly don't matter, & that's what makes the church the greatest fellowship known to man.

4th ... The greatest work (vocation) in life...is our work for God. Jesus Himself challenged us with these words, "But seek first the kingdom of God & His righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33). God's kingdom is His church, & He expects us to make it the priority of our lives! In **Matt. 20**, Jesus told a parable comparing His kingdom to a vineyard, & we can't miss the point on this because a vineyard is a place of work! And a land-owner (representing Christ) went out at different times in the day to hire laborers (rep. Christians) to work! And the point of the story is to say, regardless of when we come into the church, whether early in life or late, God expects us to work! And it doesn't matter what our abilities or talents are, He expects us to use them to advance His kingdom, & make it strong! He made this point in another parable, **Matt. 25**. But this is one of the reasons we become a Christian - to work for God! And it's one of the ways God will judge our faithful-

ness to Him! Paul says in **1st Cor. 3:8**, “...each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” I wouldn't want to stand before God on the day of Judgment as a Christian & know the only thing I'd ever done was meet for worship! As important as that is, that's not the sole reason for being a Christian! A Christian is a laborer for God! As we sometimes sing, “I want to be a worker for the Lord...” do we realize what we're singing? Do we realize what a great blessing it is to be able to work for God, to use our time, money, talents & abilities to promote His cause & to build up His kingdom?

It's our greatest vocation in life! Paul says in **1st Cor. 15:58**, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” Now, notice where Paul puts the emphasis. It's your labor “in the Lord” that's not in vain. What does that mean? It means what you do for God counts the most; it's the only thing that really matters after this life is over. You might have a very successful business; you may have more responsibility than anybody else where you work, & that's fine. But, if you don't factor GOD into the equation & let others see by your example that living & working for Him is the # 1 objective of your life, how have you helped yourself in the end? All of your 'work' is for nothing, it's vain, IF you don't work for God! {I believe all of our work can be for God's glory if it's done as a faithful Christian!} But here he's talking about the work God has given us to do to advance His kingdom. In this regard, John wrote in **Rev. 14:13** “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, & their works follow them.” The greatest work in life is what we do for God, for that's a work that'll follow us to our grave, & influence people for years after we're gone.

5th ...The greatest knowledge in life...is to know God. You can spend a lifetime accumulating knowledge, but if you don't know God, you've wasted your life! Jesus said in His prayer, **Jn 17:3**, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God & Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Knowing God & Christ isn't a casual thing; it's profound & deep. People say offhandedly, “Do you know God?” But, usually all they mean is ‘Do you believe He exists?’ But knowing God is much more than that. What does it mean to know God? It means to obey Him. **1st Jn. 2:4** says, “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ & does not keep His commandments, is a liar, &

the truth is not in him.” So a person who doesn't obey God...a person who refuses to obey the gospel...or a Christian who refuses to do what God says...he may have a few ideas about God, but he doesn't know God! To know God is to obey Him. **Also, to know God means to love one another.** 1st Jn. 4:7-8 says, **“Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God; & everyone who loves is born of God & knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”** To have any claim on God, we must love one another! A Christian who hates his brother or sister is lying to himself if he thinks he knows God. God is love, that's His dominating personality! Thus, if I belong to Him I must show that I have His love abiding in me. Otherwise, I don't really know God! That's why knowing God is the greatest knowledge in life. Because if we know God (in the true Biblical sense), we will act like His children... we'll obey Him, & we'll love to one another!

6th...The greatest gift in the world is...the gift of God's Son. Jesus said in Jn. 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”** Without a doubt, this is the greatest gift ever given because, as Jesus said, **“whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”** Of course, the word belief here is used comprehensively to include mentally accepting the fact that Jesus is the Son of God... trusting in His ability & willingness to save... & obeying what He tells us to do! The gift of Christ to the world was the greatest gift too because it meant Jesus had to give His life for us as a sacrifice. Someone has to pay for your sins. Your sins demand punishment. And Jesus was willing to pay that price; He was willing to take the punishment we deserve! Paul says in 2nd Cor. 5:21 that God **“made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”** Though Jesus was innocent & pure & had no sin of His own, God made Him to be sin for us by giving him to die on that cross as a perfect sacrifice/atonement for our sins. **Why?** So we can be covered by Jesus' blood & can stand before God clothed in His righteousness! Now, you try to comprehend that kind of gift! We can't do it! Even Paul couldn't do it. He said in 2nd Cor. 9:15, **“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.”** Indeed! The gift of God's Son is beyond our ability to describe or comprehend. But that's what God was willing to do for you & me because of His great love for us.

7th...The greatest tragedy in life is...to die unprepared. Since the greatest gift is the gift of God's Son, the greatest question is "What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?" You remember that Pilate asked that question as Jesus stood before Him on trial, & Pilate didn't want to answer it. In fact, his own wife, "Have nothing to do with this just man for I've suffered many things in a dream because of Him," (Matt. 27:19). When the mob called out for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate tried to wash his hands of all responsibility, but he could no more do that than you or I can. We all have a responsibility to do something with Jesus...either to accept Him or reject Him. And it's a personal question; it's not a matter of what your grandparents did or didn't do, or your parents or anybody else, it's a question of "what will YOU do, & what will I do?"

Certainly, the greatest tragedy in life would be to reject Jesus, knowing who He is & what He's done for us. Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Have you confessed your faith in Him & put Him on in baptism for remission of your sins? If you have, are you living faithfully in His service? If not, are you prepared to face God & answer for your sins? Whether you're young & in the spring of your life, or old & in the late autumn, you need Christ! Let me tell you a story & then we're going to stand & sing the invitation song.

One day, a group of young men were standing around talking about their athletic abilities, their great acts of strength, & all they could do, physically. And there was an old man who came into this crowd of young men & began talking to them. They kept bragging about how fast they could run & how strong they were, & one young man said, "Let's just go up to the track, & we'll race." And this old man said, "I would bet your life I can outrun any of you." And they looked at his old frail body, covered by a robe & carrying a sickle-like object, & they just laughed. But, they agreed to the old man's challenge; they lined up & the race began. One after another, the old man who started slowly, began to overtake them; & as he did, he'd touch them & they'd drop out of the race. Finally, there was only one young man left. As the old man drew near, the young man could hear his steady footsteps coming closer, & then he heard the old man chanting, "I got Adam...I got Methuselah...I got Abraham...& I'll get you!" Looking back, the young

man saw for a brief moment inside the hood, & there was a grinning skull. You see, that old man's name was "**Death**".

Your Bible says, "**It's appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,**" (Heb. 9:27). Don't let death overtake you unprepared! That would be the greatest tragedy of all. If you need to come to Christ, we urge you to come now...while together we stand & sing!