

The Mission of Jesus

1/15/23

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word comes to us this morning from our Old Testament lesson, "And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him - for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength - he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."" (Isaiah 49:5-6) This is the Word of the Lord.

Thomas Edison seems to have been a born inventor. He was given the mind, work ethic, and patience to keep on experimenting with different items until they ultimately worked. When you are given a natural skill - where it is obvious what your life's ambition should be - it makes life much easier. You can set your goals and plan your life from early on without spending half of your time just trying to figure out what you want to do.

Unfortunately, life isn't always that easy. Most young adults don't know what they want to do as they spend their first two years taking general ed in college. By the time they finally figure it out, they have to waste an extra year or two in classes they could have already taken. Even after they graduate, many live life as if they had no mission at all. They go to work or school...come home... and watch TV. That's no mission. That's just survival. God didn't create you, call you, die for you, and baptize you just to survive. And it's a shame when we don't have any more purpose in life.. than to just get by. Yet that's how many live their lives - wandering around from one hobby and one job to the next... acting like little lost puppies.

How about Jesus? Did He know His mission from birth - that He was supposed to live and die for the world? Or did this seemingly "come to him" after thirty years of his life - at his baptism? Was this role of Messiah something that was "natural" for Him... or was it a role that was seemingly beyond Him?

In other words, if Jesus was born in true humility - choosing NOT to use His powers on many occasions - did He choose to know WHAT His mission was... even from birth? Or was His humility so great that He had to LEARN even this?

I can't imagine that He went through life searching that hard for His mission. His very name - Jesus - means "the Lord saves." And even IF - and that's a BIG if - If Jesus in His humility had to learn His mission... early on His parents would have relayed to Him the words of the angels, Simeon, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men, as well as the very words of the Old Testament. As Mary and Joseph shared these stories with Him, He no doubt knew what He was to do on earth... and why He was to do it. He knew His mission.

Regardless of when Jesus knew His mission in His humility, He did know His mission from ETERNITY. Isaiah writes that "Before I was born the LORD called me;... from my birth he has made mention of my name." In Peter's first letter he writes that Jesus, "was chosen before the creation of the world." (1 Pe 1:20) The mission of Jesus was something that was pre-ordained even before God ever created the world. His mission was what He was BORN to do.

And what specifically would Jesus be born to do? "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword... in the shadow of his hand he hid me;... he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver." These kinds of words reveal Jesus to be a sort of secret and powerful weapon of God... through His mouth. When Jesus' spoke... it was a powerful thing.

Think about some of the things Jesus said to people. He told a rich man he had to sell all he owned and give it to the poor, then... come and follow Him. He told a crowd that if their tongue or their hands caused them to sin they should cut them off. He called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers." He told the people listening that He was and is the great "I AM". These are striking words! They either cut your heart... or make you angry. There is no in between.

Jesus knew that He was born to bring some fire on the earth. People wanted Him dead because of His mission. Even before He was old enough to speak... the words of the Wise Men ABOUT Jesus made Herod so angry that it caused God to hide Jesus in Egypt for a time in the "shadow of His hand."

This weapon of God would be born to also be a servant - to be called Israel - in whom God would show His glory. There already was an Israel whom God had called to be His own special people. Yet by Isaiah's time they had proven themselves to be a rebellious herd, a stiff necked people, who loved to ignore God, wrestle with Him, argue with Him, and do things their own way.

So God said to Jesus, "I am going to make you my servant Israel. Instead of wrestling with Me, you will submit to Me - whatever I tell you to do. Since Israel hasn't kept my laws, I am sending you to do as I say - as their substitute. As you do what I call you to do... it will bring glory to my Name."

That role as servant would have God also telling Him to go to a cross and suffer and die with the sins of the world on His shoulders. It was THE most difficult mission ever. And He knew what it was.

There were times that Jesus struggled with this awesome mission of His - like in the Garden of Gethsemane. He struggled at going to the cross - because He knew He would go through hell on that cross.

Yet this wasn't the only time that Jesus struggled with His mission. This portion of Isaiah opens up a whole different concept to the difficulty Jesus had with His mission. Remember what Jesus said to the Canaanite woman with the demon possessed daughter? When she came to have her daughter cured, Jesus told her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

Jesus' primary mission as Prophet was to preach to the Israelites - to reach out to the Jews. When Jesus did this He more often than not received opposition. When Jesus proclaimed gracious words, they rejected Him because he was from Nazareth. Even after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead... all some of them wanted to do... was to kill Lazarus! It seemed that no matter what He did... a majority of His own countrymen just continued to reject Him.

How would Jesus naturally respond to such continued and ongoing rejection by His own countrymen? Isaiah writes, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand... and my reward is with my God." In Matthew's Gospel Jesus mourns over Jerusalem saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...but you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37) Jesus seems genuinely frustrated with these words.

Yet it can't be a question of unbelief. Instead - in His humility - it was a question of honesty. It would only be natural for Jesus to wonder if this whole sacrifice He was making - by becoming a Jew... by living in this sinful world and dying this sinful death - what good was it doing since a majority of His countrymen were only rejecting Him anyway.

Yet this response was not only reflected in Christ. All of the prophets and apostles went through times of wondering, "what is all this sacrifice worth?" They were expecting results... but they weren't getting any.

How would God look at YOUR results, beloved? When we as Christians ignore the things we've been taught... when we continue to do things we KNOW we shouldn't be doing... Jesus must wonder the same thing.

“What was my blood worth for you? Why did I die for these St. Johnians, if all they are going to do is live like heathens?”

When you get in trouble and you hear, “what should we do with you?”, regard it as Jesus saying to you, “what good has your baptism done you? Why have I given you God fearing parents, grand-parents, spouses, teachers, bosses? Why have I blessed you with the Word - if all you’re going to do is ignore it?” When you hear your pastor encourage you and ask, “why don’t you have devotions? Why don’t you come to Bible class? Why don’t you come to worship? Why can’t you take more time with your Lord and your family”...

When you hear those questions regard them as Jesus looking at you... and asking... “have I come for nothing? Have I given you these pastors just to ignore and complain about... not listen to? Have I put you in this church just to treat you all as a bunch of strangers?”

It is not supposed to be your role in life to frustrate your pastor, your spouse, your children, your parents, your teachers, or your students - and give them the reward of complaints and ingratitude. You’ve got a higher mission in life than to ignore God. You have been called to serve God and put Him and your neighbor ahead of yourself. That, friends... is your mission! And when you don’t fulfill it... it’s frustrating to God and His servants.

Jesus wasn’t just discouraged because His people weren’t responding as MUCH as they should have. He was discouraged because the Israelites weren’t responding at ALL. Yet Jesus didn’t give up in His mission. With His own words, Jesus reminded Himself in humility, “Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.” He knew that in the end... all of the results were in His heavenly Father’s hands.

So in the end, Jesus trusted that God would take care of the RESULTS of His mission. As Jesus carried on, He witnessed the Lord’s hand - His reward – continually... God the Father sent an angel to strengthen Jesus in the Garden. After He was put to death and hell, the Father raised Jesus from the dead. The mission was accomplished - just as God had planned - whether the Jews wanted it or not.

But this wasn’t all that would encourage Jesus. “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant... to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles... that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” These words are simply amazing. When Moses was called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land he was overwhelmed at the prospect. It was impossible!

Fifteen hundred years later, God called a different Prophet to bring His people back together... to restore them from Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and the ends of the earth. Jesus, however, was not called to restore them to a specific land - rather to a specific faith - to a specific God. He wasn't just to restore them to a land - but to restore their righteousness and their holiness. Jesus was called to do this by taking the sins of the Jews - all of their sins of rejection and rebellion - and dying for it... on a tree. Think about that. Jesus was sent to die for millions of Jews... and to bring them together through faith. That is quite a deed in and of itself!

God looked at the salvation of these millions of rebellious people that have lived throughout the centuries... and what did He say about it? That's NOT ENOUGH. IT'S TOO SMALL A THING! Too small a thing - that God would save millions of Jews! In the mind of a gracious God - that IS way too small. He wanted to do something even grander than that. "I've called you and sent you to take on the sins of the WORLD - to gather all people together - no matter what race they are - under the same faith in Christ."

So when Jesus was given the complete scope of His salvation - that this wasn't just salvation for the Jews - but for the world - it would make Him realize the great scope and effectiveness of this sacrifice. He was dying for the sins of the world. He was going to be a light for the Gentiles - to bring salvation to the very ends of the earth. This would not be a worthless sacrifice. It made Jesus rejoice in the faith of the centurion - take time to talk to the Samaritan woman - and heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman.

Think about what a comforting text this is for YOU, brothers and sisters. Many of us have gone through life without fulfilling much of a mission at all. We leave the legacies of what? Working at a factory... an office... having some children and then... dying? It doesn't seem like we fulfill much of a mission at all. We don't save anyone. We don't go on missionary trips. We don't travel overseas or risk our lives. It feels like we're worthless in mission.

But here's the good news. Even if your boss thinks you're worthless... even if your spouse gets agitated with you... even if your parents are constantly yelling at you... even if your students disrespect you... even if you just don't feel like you have a purpose or mission in life - if you feel like a complete failure... according to this text - you still fulfill a purpose.

Usually, when you think of a mission - or a purpose in life - you think of what YOU have to do. So when asked, "What is your purpose, or mission?", you tend to think of your achievements. In a very ironic way, your mission is to complete Christ's mission - by doing NOTHING but listening and believing and receiving. When you came to church this morning... you fulfilled Jesus' mission.

When you were baptized... Jesus was getting His blood's worth. When you were given faith by the gift of the Holy Spirit... Jesus was rejoicing. When you - stinking and rotten sinner - came before God this morning and admitted your sin - and yet clung to the gracious words of forgiveness - you made Jesus' mission complete. Because when He grabs hold of your soul... He knows... that He didn't die for nothing. He died... for YOU. As long as you confess that you are a sinner who believes in Jesus as your personal Savior - you are fulfilling Jesus' mission... and making Jesus joyful.

When He hears you singing praise to Him – even if off-key - you are making Jesus say, “I didn't die for nothing. You are a precious soul! Even if the my countrymen have rejected me... and even if the whole world were to reject Me... just knowing that YOU... believe in me... makes that sacrifice worth it - because Me and my angels rejoice at the repentance and faith of just ONE sinner - and that... is you.” What a great comfort this is - what a great gift of God it is - to know... that the mission of Jesus is completed... in us, beloved. This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.

PLEASE RISE

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.