

Title: “What is your purpose?”

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1 Cor. 9:16-23, Mark 1:32-39

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Lesson: *Jesus was sent for this purpose: to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. What is our purpose? Why were we sent? We are called to view our vocation in the same light as Christ and to model his life through a focus on our destination, active prayer, and proclamation of the good news.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The Taj Mahal. Construction began in 1632 and took 20,000 workers almost 22 years to complete. It consists of several main elements including a gateway, garden, mosque, and mausoleum. Some consider it one of the most beautiful structures in the world. This complex had a purpose, a reason for its creation and its creator planned for over a year before a single stone was laid or before the ground was even prepared. In his mind, he knew the path that would have to be followed, from inception to completion, in order for his plan to be realized. He knew what it would take to *prepare* that path so that those he would call to do this work could travel down it, could execute his wishes, and build his complex. And here is probably the most important point I'd like to make about the Taj Mahal: its purpose was preconceived. It wasn't built and then assigned a reason. It was *assigned* a reason *before* it was built.

In our gospel passage today, we hear about the purpose for Jesus. Starting in verse 32:

³² That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³ And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴ And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. ³⁶ And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, ³⁷ and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." ³⁹ And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus was sent for a purpose and that has been the focus of our messages over these past months. For Advent we discussed that Jesus came *through* sinners *for* sinners and just after Christmas Pastor spoke about the perfect timing of Christ's birth. A few weeks ago, we read the opening verses of

Mark and learned how John came to prepare the way for Jesus. The gospel now begins to unpack what that means - what Jesus came here to do. He came to proclaim the kingdom of God to the Jews. He came bringing forgiveness of sins to all those who would believe. And the outwardly sign of that forgiveness was physical healing but he came as a doctor for the soul. As we travel with him in this gospel we'll read about his focus on Jerusalem. We'll walk with him as he makes his way towards the city where he will accept the punishment for all our sins and hand over his life on the cross. And at Easter we'll celebrate his resurrection, his victory over death. *This was Jesus' purpose and there was nothing accidental about it.* Like the Taj Mahal, his purpose was preplanned, his path prepared; the timing perfect, nothing was left to chance. It was crystal clear to him why he was on the Earth and in obedience he accepted his purpose and fulfilled it... perfectly.

We know this; we accept this; we *believe* this, so why do I bring it up? When it comes to Jesus, we don't question God's plan for him. We don't question what might have happened if he chose not to heal that person on the Sabbath or if he chose not to reply to the Pharisees in the way that he did. We know that God's plan that he was executing through Jesus would not be hindered, not be obstructed. There would be no way that Jesus would escape God's judgement for our sins. There is nothing that could stop God's plan. We know this. We accept this. We *believe* this. So why do I bring it up?

Because when it comes to *us* it all falls apart. We fail to really, truly believe that "God chose us in him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)." We read that. We even reference it in our conversations, but do we believe it? Do we *really* believe it? At the same time that God had a plan for Jesus, his Son, he also had a plan for *us*. At the same time God knew why Jesus would be born, what his purpose would be for creation, he knew all that about us. Think about the implications of that truth claim. If you believe this verse, I mean *really* believe what God says in that verse you believe that there is no way you could *not* have been born. You were not the luck of some random seed - you were pieced together intentionally by God. You were placed in the womb, by God. And *nothing* would stop God's plan for your birth.

But it's not your birth that was God's end goal. Like the Taj Mahal, once the ground was prepared, the work wasn't over - it had only just begun. Our work, our purpose begun the day that we were born. Our journey began the day we were baptized. And what is that purpose? For Paul, it was to preach the gospel. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Those are Paul's words, and he had a clear understanding of his purpose. He was to preach - but not just for the sake of preaching but to turn others to Jesus.

²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

This was God's purpose for Paul; this was God's reason for creating Paul and there was nothing accidental about it. There is no way that Paul could have *not* been born. Paul understood his purpose, he understood his reason for being and like Jesus he was laser focused on completing that purpose. He wasn't perfect, and he didn't make all the right decisions, but his conversion story is a comfort to each one of us that even we can't mess up the plans that God has for us.

But what of us? What is our purpose? It's the same - to preach the gospel but not necessarily in that narrow sense. He doesn't call every man to be a pastor. He doesn't call everyone to become a door-to-door evangelist. But he does call everyone to love him and love others. He calls everyone to serve each other in selflessness. Not just by volunteering our time and our treasures to feed the hungry and house the homeless, but in everything that we do, and in every place that we find ourselves. We preach the gospel to others at our workplace when we treat them with honesty and fairness and respect. We preach the gospel in our homes when we teach our children about Christ and when we model for them what it means to love God and love others. We preach the gospel to ourselves when we devote time to God by learning more about him through the study of Scripture. You see, this is *our purpose*. This is why God placed us here in this community, at this time, in this family, with this job, and these friends. None of it is an accident. None of it is coincidental. All of it is part of God's divine plan and he invites us to participate in it. He invites us to call out to him in prayer, to ask him to show us our purpose. Not just for our entire lives but for every moment that fills it. We just have to ask him to help us see each of these moments. God knows our purpose for every moment of every day. Do you?

Let us pray.

God, you have formed us from the dust of the earth and have placed us here to glorify you. At times we forget why we were sent and at times we even rebel and reject our mission. Forgive us and help us stay focused on preaching the gospel to everyone we meet. Keep us laser focused on that which you would have us do and give us the strength and endurance until the end.

In your name we pray.

Amen.