Missional Living

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Mark 1:9-15

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John
in the Jordan. 10And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the
heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.11And a voice
came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved;-with you I am well pleased.'
12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the
wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts;
and the angels waited on him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to
Galilee, proclaiming the good news-of God,15and saying, 'The time is fulfilled,
and the kingdom of God has come near;-repent, and believe in the good news.

1. Greatest Turning Point

In our lives we have many turning points. School, our first job, marriage, and children are all turning points in our lives. The first time when I went to church by myself was the most important turning point in my life. Before I became a Christian, I had a wonderful plan for my life, but after I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I began to ask God what God's plan was for me.

2. Jesus' Turning Point

Today's scripture talks about the greatest turning point of Jesus. Verse 9 says, "***In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan***." Jesus grew up in Nazareth and lived there from boyhood. Nazareth was a small town in Galilee. The city was despised and avoided by many Jews. John's gospel talks about the dialogue between Philip and Nathaniel. When Philip said to Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah who was from Nazareth, Nathaniel asks, "***Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"*** (1:46).

We do not know what Jesus did while in Nazareth. Luke's gospel tells us that he went to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Passover when he was 12 years old. In Matthew 13:55, when Jesus visited his hometown he began preaching to the people in the synagogue, people were amazed and asked, "***Isn't this the carpenter's son***?" Jesus' father was a carpenter. Mark 6:3 says Jesus followed his father's profession and became a carpenter. The term for "the carpenter" or "tekton" in Greek means not only "carpenter" but also "builder." So Jesus would have worked in something related to construction.

3. Jesus' Baptism

How did Jesus come to the Jordan River and was baptized by John? Jesus knew who John was and what he was doing because John and Jesus were relatives. The four gospels do not say anything about how Jesus came to the Jordan River. But when Jesus left Nazareth and came to Galilee to be baptized, he must have had a sense of call from God.

Why did John baptize people in the Jordan River? Is John the first person who baptized people? Baptism did not start with John. Jews practiced the ritual as an act of purification and the initiation of converts to Judaism long before John the Baptist did. Leviticus 16:4 says, "***He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undergarments next to his body, … and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on***." The Levite priests were commanded to perform a symbolic cleansing in water before and after performing their priestly duties. Here we see some of the glimpses into the origin of baptism.

The purpose of John's baptism however was different from Jewish tradition. John baptized people as a sign of repentance. Repentance means "to turn from evil" or "return to God." Repentance requires a turning from trusting in other gods and to make a commitment to follow God's law in anticipation of the Messiah's arrival. What does Jesus' baptism by John mean? Did Jesus need to repent? Likely no. But Jesus still got baptized by John. Jesus' baptism was likely a way for Jesus to show his dedication and his call to missional living.

We need to pay attention to three events in Jesus' baptism. First, "***He saw the heavens torn apart.***" The verb, "being torn apart" in the passage gives some sense that the kingdom of God is near. Second, Jesus saw "***the Spirit descending like a dove on him***." The dove would have been a symbol of God's promise, and the image of the spirit descending on Jesus may imply God's enabling presence to equip Jesus for his ministry. Third, a voice came down from heaven, saying, "***You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased***." The heavenly voice identified Jesus as the Son of God who had a special relationship with the Lord.

But the role of God's Son was that of a servant. In Isaiah 42:1, the servant of the Lord is introduced. "***Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights***." In Mark's gospel, Jesus is the true servant-messiah. Jesus was brought into the world to be a servant and suffer for the forgiveness of sins of all people for all time. The baptism of Jesus is a turning point for Jesus to begin his role as both the Son and a true servant of God.

4. Jesus' Temptation

After Jesus is baptized, he is sent by the Spirit into the wilderness. Verses 12 & 13 say, "***The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*** ***[13]He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan***." During that time, the desert was viewed traditionally as a haunted place of evil powers. Why

then was Jesus led by the Spirit into the desert? We can think of two reasons. First, if the Spirit led Jesus to the desert, God was putting Jesus to the test to make sure Jesus was ready for his messianic mission. Second, Satan tried to draw Jesus away from his mission. We see that in the desert, Jesus would battle Satan, but overcome the temptations through the power of the Spirit.

5. Jesus' Ministry

After the temptation, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. "***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news***" (1:15). Mark tells us that Jesus began to preach the good news of God after John the Baptist was arrested by Herod. Jesus' message can be summarized by two declarations and two commands. The first declaration is "the time has come." God's appointed time of coming of the Messiah now stood fulfilled in accord with God's plan. The second declaration is "the kingdom of God is near." The term "kingdom" means "kingship" or "royal rule." The phrase "the kingdom of God" refers to God's sovereign ruling over his creation.

As some of us know, the Israelites at the time were expecting a future messianic kingdom to be established on earth in keeping with Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah 14:9 says, "***The LORD will become king over all the earth***." The people who heard Jesus talk about the kingdom of God would have thought of the long-awaited messianic kingdom predicted in the Old Testament.

Jesus summoned his hearers: "***Repent, and believe in the good news***." To "repent" is to turn away from an existing object of trust. The term "believe" means to commit oneself wholeheartedly to an object of faith. Thus to believe in the good news would mean to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior and the Son of God. Jesus was the core of the good news.

6. Conclusion

John the Baptist and Jesus know what their missions are and live their lives accordingly. Jesus lived most of his life as a carpenter and builder in Nazareth. When he was baptized by John, he began to preach. Luke 3:23 says, "***Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.***" While he was in the construction business in Nazareth, Jesus must have known his mission and the calling that God had brought him into the world for. But after he was baptized, he lived a completely missional life. Jesus gave hope to many people.

Last Wednesday, a school shooting occurred once again in Parkland, Florida. Some say there have been 18 school shootings this year, but I've heard that the accurate number is 6. The number of shootings may not be important. But it is so sad that so many people are grieving at the death of 17 innocent students, a football coach, athletic director, and a teacher. Scott Beigel, a 35-year-old geography teacher was one of the victims. One student said that the teacher helped protect the students and said, "I am alive today because of him."

Aaron Feis, a 37-year-old assistant football coach was killed when he threw himself in front of students to protect them from oncoming bullets. Chris Hixon, 49, the school athletic director is missed by many students. He treated the students as his own. He regularly gave students rides or lunch money. He opened up his home to them. So many wonderful people lost their lives.

After this tragedy, a lot of conversation has been shared about gun control. But beyond the conversation on guns, I think we need to focus on the fundamental reasons why something like this happens. Problems at home, school, and in the community can all contribute to events like these. As long as there are people who are upset and are isolated in their anger, events like these will happen again and again.

Who can give hope to those people who are heartbroken, saddened, upset, frustrated, angry, and furious? Will we just wait for the change of the law about gun control? If the law is never changed, will we just lament the social problems without doing anything? What are Christians who try to live missional lives doing?

7. Application

Let me share a story about a woman who lives a missional life. Chelsea Haley is a 26-year-old middle school teacher. She joined Teach for America to make a difference and served in a low-income school. Chelsea met fourth-grader Jerome Robinson while she was teaching in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. At certain points, Jerome's behavior got so bad that Chelsea thought about quitting being a teacher. Jerome lived with his birth mother at the time. Life was hard for the family after Jerome's mom's husband died. Jerome had a newborn brother Jace, and the family had to move around a lot. Oftentimes, the family lived with their grandparents.

One night, Chelsea felt as though God came to her in a dream, telling her she was destined to be Jerome's mother. She laughed out loud at the idea and went back to sleep. But the next day at school, Jerome asked Chelsea if he could live with her. At the time, she was planning to return to Georgia. The next day, Jerome's mother told her that she wanted Haley to take Jerome and Jace with her to Georgia. She filed papers for permanent custody of Jerome in December 2015. Later she filed papers to adopt Jace as well. They now live in Marietta, GA. Chelsea was just a teacher, but God called Chelsea to a mission greater than she had thought. Let us watch a video clip of the story.

How would you and I like to live the rest of our lives? John the Baptist and Jesus lived missional lives. We do not have to be preachers to live missionally. Whatever we do God would want us to live a more meaningful life. I hope all of you and I pray for God to give us direction on how to live His mission for our lives every day. So our missional living brings hope and happiness to us, to our homes, schools, works, communities, and the world. Amen.