

Sent Out With a Purpose

“For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed.” (Acts 13:36)

What a great obituary. “David had served God’s purpose.” That is the way I want it to be read when I die: “Barry served God’s purpose.”

Unfortunately, it is not always that way. There is so much that demands our attention. So much that distracts and takes us off course. The greatest hindrance, however, is when a person or a church has no idea of what their purpose is in life. This happens more often than not.

Dr. Hugh Moorhead, a philosophy professor at Northeastern Illinois University, wrote to 250 of the world’s best philosophers, scientists, writers, intellectuals and key thinkers, asking them, “What is the meaning of life?” Some offered their best guess and others admitted that they just made up a purpose. Others were pretty straight-forward and said they had no idea. Some of them wrote to him and asked him to write back and tell them if he discovered the purpose of life (Chicago Review Press, 1988).

Knowing the purpose for which you exist is the key to living a productive and fruitful life. This is true for individuals, as it is true for congregations.

The effective churches are those who minister with a sense of purpose, evaluating everything in light of that purpose. Those individuals that I have known whose lives have been fruitful and productive live with an inner awareness that God has sent them into this world to accomplish something.

When I consider the life of Jesus, I see Him in this way. He lived each day with an awareness of being sent. From the Gospel of John, this becomes so apparent. Read the verses that follow slowly and thoughtfully. Ponder and reflect on what they reveal about the life of Jesus:

“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work’” (4:34).

“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” (5:30).

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (6:38).

“But I know him because I am from him and he sent me” (7:29).

“The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him” (8:29).

“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (9:4).

“Then Jesus cried out, ‘When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me’” (12:44-45).

“For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it” (12:49).

“I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me” (13:20).

“Now this is eternal life: that that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (17:3).

“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me” (17:8).

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (17:18).

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (20:21).

What was it like to hang out with Him on a daily basis, constantly hearing Him refer to His being sent? It would have to rub off on those He was with during those three years. It did. Years later, the influence of Jesus can be heard through Peter’s words when he wrote:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Peter did not always see things this way. In the beginning, when Jesus asked him to become a fisher of men, Peter’s response was to ask Jesus to get out of the boat. Now, here is Peter with that same inner sense of being sent by God to carry out a specific mission in life.

As Jesus lived out His life with a clear sense of being sent by the Father, He then

sent not only Peter, but you and me and every church that bears His name into the world. In years past, the emphasis in the local church was placed more on supporting those missionaries who had been sent into the mission field. In a world that has changed and now resembles more the world of the first century, the vision needs to be raised up within each church that *every member* is a missionary.

Think of it in this way: Wherever you go in the day ahead—to the office or to the classroom or to the mall—go into the day as one who is sent. How would it change your routine to go with the sense of being sent? It was that sense of purpose that compelled Jesus each and every day. It is that sense of purpose that He now places before us when He says,

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

This is the sense I get when I read these well known words of Ephesians 2:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (vs. 10).

Imagine going into each day, sent by God, looking for those opportunities to do good works that He prepared for you before you were even born. That has a way of changing the outlook of a day into one that is loaded with possibilities and purpose.

The life of Jesus was defined and guided by the knowledge that He was sent by the Father. This was always on His mind. It kept Him accountable and focused. What makes us think that it is any different for us? When we lose this sense of being sent, as a church or as individuals, we run the danger of being taken off course by many distractions. The result? Our life, or our ministry, is unproductive. In Titus 3:14, God says,

“Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.”

We know all too well the stories of those who lost focus along the way. John Stott expresses it this way:

“The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ’s warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called ‘nominal Christianity.’ In countries to which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their

convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism” (p. 108).

Enough for nominal Christianity and its thin veneer in our lives. Just as many in Dr. Moorhead’s survey wanted to hear back as to whether he discovered anything about life’s purpose, the world is eager to learn from people of purpose. More importantly, God is looking for people who will enter into this day with the awareness that He has sent them with a purpose. When our hearts are ablaze with His purpose, the world will take notice that we too have been with Jesus.

Go ahead, put your name in the blank: “_____ served God’s purpose.” Let it begin with this day. One day at a time—wouldn’t it be great to be able to say that in this day you served God’s purpose?

Prayer: Jesus, as you were sent by your Father, you now send me. Help me this day to serve your purpose for your glory. **Amen.**

Challenge: Write on an index card, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20: 21). Carry the card with you throughout the day and place it somewhere to remind you of being sent into this day in His name.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2

From the Book of Concord: “This teaching states that in his intention and counsel God had preordained the following:

1. That the human race has been truly redeemed and reconciled with God through Christ, who has merited with his innocent obedience, suffering, and death both the righteousness that avails before God [Rom. 1:17; 3:21–26; 2 Cor. 5:21] and eternal life.

2. That this merit and the benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through his Word and sacraments.

3. That God wills to be effective and active in us with his Holy Spirit through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and meditated on, to convert our hearts to true repentance, and to enlighten them in true faith.

4. That he wills to make righteous all those who in true repentance accept Christ by faith, and he wills to receive them into grace as children and heirs of eternal life.

5. That he wills to sanctify in love those whom he has justified, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1[:4].

6. That he wills to protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, to guide and lead them in his ways, to lift them up when they fall, and to comfort and preserve them in crosses and trials.

7. That he wills to strengthen and increase in them the good work that he has begun in them and to preserve them to the end, when they abide in God's Word, pray diligently, persevere in God's goodness, and faithfully use the gifts they have received.

8. That he wills, finally, to save and glorify forever in eternal life those whom he has elected, called, and justified" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article XI: Election, pp. 643-644.14-22).