

CALLS

Mark 1:9-20

How do most people decide what they will do with their lives with regard to the work they do or what we loosely call their “occupations” or “careers?” Many would probably think that “it just happens” and there would be several events or persons who influenced how things turn out. Some people might say that what they do or did resulted from an inner conviction that the work in which they were involved was closely tied to their purpose or mission in life. A term that we sometimes use for such a situation is a “calling.”

How do we see ourselves in relationship to the work we do in the church or even in the broader community? For example, we may teach Sunday School, help in Awana, sing in the choir, work in the Nursery, mow the grass, greet people as they come to church, help out with repair work, and such things. What is the name we use to describe ourselves and others who do such work? We likely consider ourselves to be volunteers!

There are differences in the commitments and the outcome expectations (immediate rewards) of careers, volunteer involvements, and callings. How would we rank (highest to lowest) the expected level of commitments for these three categories? Commitment would be highest for callings followed by careers and then volunteer work. Regarding the expectations of immediate rewards we would likely list careers as first, volunteer involvements as second and callings as a distant third.

The difference in occupation and calling is easy to see in the life of Saul of Tarsus. By “occupation” he was a tentmaker and by “calling” he was a proclaimer of the good news of salvation. In the case of John the Baptist, we don’t see any mention of him having an occupation. However, we do know that he had a calling and that was to be the one who was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah by calling people to believe that the kingdom of God was at hand and to repent by turning back to God. We could even make a case that Jesus’ occupation was carpentry, but his calling was to be the Savior and Lord of all. As we will see, there were several people whose occupation was being fishers of fish, but had a calling to be fishers of men.

Affirmed – 1:9-11

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.” Mark 1:9–11 (NASB95)

Mark’s account of the life and ministry of Jesus starts with the beginning of what we typically call the public ministry of Jesus. Jesus was about thirty years old at this time which was the age that Levite priests would begin their duties. Mark referred to this account as the “good message” of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. A typical word that many of us use for the Greek word “*euaggelion*” is the term “gospel” which comes from an Anglo-Saxon rendering of “good spell.” Many people equate the word “gospel” with the concept of “unquestionable truth” which may not always be the case. In other words, we can sometimes hear “good news” that is not the truth.

The time was probably the year A.D. 27. There was an error of about four years in the calendar compared to the time when Jesus was born. The time period of the ministry of Jesus starting with His baptism by John until his crucifixion is generally accepted to be three and a half years. That would put the baptism sometime in the autumn of the year 27.

We know from some of the other accounts of this period of time that the specific “good

news” that John was proclaiming was that “the Kingdom of Heaven was near” and that people needed to “prepare” themselves for this by repenting or turning away from and abandoning sinful practices.

We tend to think in terms of the gospel being the overall description of all aspects of the total ministry of Jesus involving His birth, life, ministry, miracles, arrest, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Of course, John the Baptist did not present the “full message” since the fullness of this message was just beginning to be revealed.

People from all walks of life came to him and many believed his message and acted on his call for repentance and abandoning sins in their lives. They gave testimony to this change by publicly confessing their sins and being baptized by John in the Jordan River.

The baptism ritual had been around and practiced long before John the Baptist came on the scene. One notable practice was a requirement for non Jewish proselytes to be immersed before being accepted as converts to Judaism. Also, many of the ceremonial washings that were to correct conditions of “uncleanness” according to Jewish laws were by total immersion. People understood the significance of the immersion ritual that John was asking people to do. It is easy to see that the ritual can be a testimony of significant changes in a number of different situations people might encounter in life.

A common error that some people make is to say that John’s baptism was for the “forgiveness of sins” as if going through the ritual resulted in their sins being forgiven. Instead of the word “forgiveness” which is used in some of the newer translations, other translations use the word “remission” which can be somewhat ambiguous as to the meaning. Many of us think that “remission of sins” means forgiveness or pardon for sins. Let’s consider the context of the statement “repentance unto remission of sins.” We can then combine that with the idea that “remission” simply means the absence of a condition (as in remission of a disease is a state of absence of disease activity). Now we can see that “remission of sins” is simply another way of describing repentance which literally means a change of mind. When we repent, then we change our minds (value system) and that results in abandoning sinful practices that had been a part of our lives. It simply means that we stop doing (remission) the sinful things in our lives.

Matthew’s account tells us that Jesus came from Galilee to Judea “to be baptized” by John while Mark simply tells us that He came “and was baptized.” We have already noted that all the others being baptized by John were for a testimony of repentance following a confession of their sins. Obviously, Jesus’s baptism was NOT for the same purpose. Jesus made no confession of sins since He is without sin. Mark did not state why Jesus submitted to John’s baptism and does not report the protest made by John that he needed to be baptized by Jesus as reported by Matthew and Luke.

Many commentators have speculated various reasons by Jesus wanted to be baptized. Some have said that it was an act of obedience and that raises a question of “obedience to what law or command?” Another stated that this was evidence that Jesus agreed with what John was doing in calling people to repentance, confessing their sins and giving a public testimony. That seems quite obvious that Jesus did agree but still does not answer the question of what He was “giving testimony of” by being baptized. The idea that Jesus was showing that He identified with the nation of Israel in their sinful predicament was suggested. Another idea was put forth that Jesus’ baptism was an act of self-dedication to His messianic mission, signifying His official acceptance and entrance into it. The most often given reason we hear from pulpits today is that Jesus did it to set an example for us to follow. The argument is made that since Jesus did it, then

we should also do it. We can legitimately argue that His entire life was an example for us to follow, but in this particular act, it would be good for us to know why He was engaged in the act of baptism.

If we examine Jesus' own words in Matthew's account, we read that Jesus wanted to use what was happening in the baptism ritual to demonstrate what was required to fulfill all righteousness or to be in a right and pleasing relationship with God. He was essentially laying out God's plan of salvation in the imagery of the baptism.

From this side of the cross we can readily see that the plan involves dying to self, burial or putting away that which is dead, resurrection with new life that comes from being born from above, and then being empowered by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which happened immediately when Jesus came up out of the water. It was not the ritual of being immersed in water that fulfilled all righteousness but it was the reality that the ritual represented that mattered. This act of the baptism of Jesus was a preview of His calling or ministry that we routinely refer to as the "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus was born of the Spirit and "had the Holy Spirit" from the moment of conception. But now we see that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. This was a special anointing of the Holy Spirit that equipped Jesus to carry out the mission which He came to accomplish. We also see in Mark's account that God's approval was voiced from heaven for the commitment that Jesus made. When we are born again of the Spirit of God, we have the Holy Spirit. Based on what we see in the life of Jesus, we also need an anointing of God's Spirit before we can have an effective ministry.

Tested – 1:12-13

¹² Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. Mark 1:12-13 (NASB95)

When we are faced with hard decisions and difficult choices it can be very helpful to find a place of solitude so that the critical issues can be dealt with apart from the distraction of everyday life. There is a sense of urgency and critical importance in the words chosen by Mark regarding this period in the initial days of the ministry of Jesus.

The announcement of Jesus' public ministry brought immediate attention from Satan in the form of temptations to choose an alternate way to bring salvation to the world. Satan's way is the empty, crooked way that is more form than substance. Jesus overcame the temptation of Satan and was able to effectively use the Word of God as the foundation upon which He stood. We must be able to do the same thing. If we can't use God's Word effectively, then we will fall for the tricks of Satan to take a short cut and miss God's plan. It may be a stretch to relate the idea of wild beasts to the words of Satan and the messages from the word of God (the Scriptures) to angels. Satan's plans would devour and destroy while God's precepts minister to us.

Such times of testing help us to settle things in our minds and to set parameters by which we will operate when temptations arise later on in life.

Heard – 1:14-15

¹⁴ Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:14-15 (NASB95)

The transition of the ministry of John the Baptist to that of Jesus happened rather abruptly since John was removed from the scene by his arrest and imprisonment. Jesus was sure of His

message and started proclaiming it immediately in the area of Galilee.

Jesus' message was fourfold:

(1) The time had come

God had promised to send the Messiah to Israel to usher in the Kingdom of God. Many devout Jews had looked for the coming of this Leader and yet when Jesus came on the scene, hardly anyone recognized Him.

(2) The Kingdom of God was near

This is not an external Kingdom, as many thought it would be, but it is spiritual in nature and is a result of having the King (Jesus) ruling and reigning in our hearts. This Kingdom was described by the Apostle Paul as "Righteous, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost."

(3) Repent

Man's natural tendency is away from God. That tendency results in spiritual death as well as physical death (the wages of sin is death). Repentance is simply turning around and heading back toward God. Actions are preceded by thoughts. This means that repentance must take place in our hearts and minds which will result in our actions being changed. The idea of "repentance" carries with it the implication of what we would say in today's vernacular "turn your back on something." It is total abandonment (or remission) of what we were trusting in and not just adding on another option to something else in which we are putting our trust.

(4) Believe the gospel

When we see the words "Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel" do we think that He told them about His dying on the cross and about His resurrection and the forgiveness of sin and eternal life? I don't see that in the scripture passage! So what did He announce? "The reign of God was about to commence." That was the "good news." We are more familiar with the words, "The kingdom of God is at hand." So, what does that mean?

To the Jews who were looking forward to the establishment of a renewed Davidic kingdom and a return to the glory years of the time when David and Solomon were on the throne of Israel, it was the ultimate hope for the nation.

So, what did they need to do to be a part of what was about to happen? According to the message that Jesus proclaimed, they were to "Repent and believe the good news!" Literally, they were being asked to "stop trusting in whatever they were depending on" and start trusting in the sovereign rule of God in their lives and in the world. Since that did not make sense in the context of their preconceived ideas about the kingdom of God, then they ignored the instructions given and kept looking for evidence of a power play that would overthrow the Romans and dominate their neighbors.

Jesus had talked about the Kingdom of God earlier in His meeting with Nicodemus. He told Nicodemus that people cannot experience (see or enter) this Kingdom without being born of the Spirit. To experience the Kingdom was more than just realizing the existing of the Kingdom of God and what it stands for. It is becoming part of that Kingdom. A person in another country may realize that the United States exists and may know the principle for which it stands and may even desire to be here; however, all that kind of belief does **not** result in citizenship in the USA. Likewise, many people think because they know about the Kingdom of God and they "believe in its principles" that they are, therefore, a part of it. One must enter the Kingdom and the only way is via the New Birth. Unless you are born again of the Spirit of God, you cannot even see the Kingdom of God. There is nothing more important for us to do on earth than to make sure that we are in the Kingdom of God by putting our complete trust in the good news of the reign of God in our lives.

Followed – 1:16-20

¹⁶ As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” ¹⁸ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. ¹⁹ Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him. Mark 1:16–20 (NASB95)

Jesus started out getting others involved in the ministry He had. He walked by some guys working in their boats and said “Follow Me.” Does it seem strange that Peter, James, John and Andrew would just drop what they were doing and take off to follow this Preacher? Many times the scene is presented that way and we get the impression that it was almost magical – like the Pied Piper that people would just follow Him because He said to do it. This was NOT their first encounter with Jesus. They had talked with Jesus following His baptism by John approximately a year earlier. Andrew and John were followers of John the Baptist and upon hearing John proclaim “Behold the Lamb of God” started following Jesus and spend some time with Him. Andrew brought Simon his brother and Philip was there also. Philip found Nathanael and introduced him to Jesus. These five were probably the disciples that were mentioned as being with Jesus at the wedding in Cana.

So here we are a year later and Jesus came to Galilee and started gathering those people whom He had come to know over the past year and called them to leave what they had been doing and follow Him and be fully committed to the good news that the Kingdom of God was being revealed. Their decision to leave the fishing for fish and to become fishers of men was not a spur of the moment decision but something they had been wrestling with for many months. Their previous exposure to the ministry of Jesus had convinced them that He was not an ordinary person. In fact, when Nathanael was first introduced to Jesus, he made a declaration, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.”

So are there lessons to be learned regarding leadership with what we see in the life of Jesus? There are a few things that stand out as good examples to follow if one is to be a leader. Jesus demonstrated ability and competence. He was visionary. He cultivated relationships with those who would be following Him. He challenged them to make a sacrifice for a cause. He also invited specific people to follow Him.