

WHAT IS YOUR CALLING?

Two Kentucky horse racing stable owners had developed a keen rivalry. Each spring they both entered a horse in a local race. One of them thought that having a professional rider might give his horse an edge in the race, so he hired a hot-shot jockey. Well, the day of the race finally came, and as usual, their two horses were leading the race right down to the last fence. But that final fence was too much for both of the horses. Both of them fell, and both riders were thrown. But that didn't stop the professional jockey. He remounted quickly and easily won the race. When he got back to the stable, he found the horse owner fuming with rage. He really didn't understand his behavior, because he had won the race. So the jockey asked, "What's the matter with you? I won the race, didn't I?" The red-faced owner nodded, "Oh, yes, you won the race. But you won it on the wrong horse!"

That jockey had the best of intentions. He intended to win the race. But he became distracted from the task. He made a bad decision. Ultimately, he failed in what he was trying to do. You know, often times we wind up doing the same thing in our walk with Jesus. We start out strong with the best of intentions. However, at some point we become distracted and lose our way. At times like this it is important to go back to the beginning and remember how you came to faith and what Jesus has called you to. This was true of Peter:

John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs ." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

1. REVIEWING Your Calling – vs. 1-6

It is important to every so often remind yourself of your calling. This means going back in your mind to the point when God saved you and called you to follow and serve Him. Peter and the other disciples were discouraged. They were waiting for Jesus to appear and they were growing impatient. They began to look back on the good old days of their lives before things became so complicated and frankly who can blame them. The days when there was a daily routine that could be counted on, were there was security of knowing what was next and the satisfaction of running their own lives.

John 21:1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: 2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Peter was having one of those days and he says in verse 3 “ I’m going out to fish.” The Greek word used here is HUPAGO and can be used to mean I RETIRE. Some authors feel that these words were an indication that Peter was ready to quit preaching and go back to what he knew best, fishing.

The details of what happened next are very similar to when Peter was first called into ministry. Both occurred on the Sea of Galilee, both times Peter couldn’t catch a thing, both times Jesus told him to throw his nets into the water and both times there is a miraculous catch. As we go through life it is important to take time regularly and go back to where it all began.

When a couple is having difficulty in their marriage they often return to where they spent their honeymoon to remind them of what they had and to act as a starting point once more. It is a reminder of what you have and where you have come from.

I had the opportunity to do that a few years ago. I was a speaker at Camp Hermosa – a Baptist church camp near Goderich ON. That is the camp I was saved at 40 years ago. I have not had the chance to visit in many years. It was great to be able to go back to my beginnings and visit the exact spot and remember that moment that changed my life so many years ago.

Where is that place for you? Where is it that you go to in your own mind when things get tough and you feel like quitting? Maybe for some you cannot identify a specific place and time where you felt the Lord’s calling. Often we fail in our calling because we do not understand the significance and importance of what Christ has called us to. We forget what really matters. Do you understand that God has a plan for your life? Do you understand your calling and can you see how God wants to change the world through you?

In 1973 Gary Kildall wrote the first popular operating system for personal computers, named CP/M. IBM approached Kildall in 1980 about developing the operating system for IBM PCs. But Kildall snubbed IBM officials at a crucial meeting. The day IBM came calling, he chose to fly his new airplane. The frustrated IBM executives turned instead to Bill Gates, founder of a small company named Microsoft, and his operating system named MS-DOS. Fourteen years later Bill Gates was worth more than eight billion dollars. An author called Paul Carroll once said of Kildall, “He was a smart guy who didn’t realize how big the operating system would become”. In a similar way, people don’t often realize how big God’s kingdom will someday become. God comes calling with the offer of a lifetime, and we miss the opportunity and find other things to do.

2. RENEWING Your Calling – vs. 15-17

There are times in life when we will fail and fall. At those times we need to not only review but also renew our calling. No matter how badly you have blown it, Jesus wants to restore you. He still wants to be your very best friend and still can use you to build His kingdom. To do this there are some steps that you have to take. You need to confront your sin, admit it and confess. Once you resolve that, God can and will restore you and return you to fruitful service.

Jesus starts here by addressing Peter by his real name Simon. As Peter had not been much of a rock Jesus goes back to the name he had when they first met. There are many questions Jesus might have asked Peter that day. He might have asked, “Why did you deny me? What do you have to say for yourself?” Instead He asks Peter a simple question; “do you love me?”

Jesus is not implying that Peter doesn't love Him. He is bringing Peter to the bedrock of what makes him tick. He is taking him to the prerequisite of all ministry. "Do you love me?" Nothing is more fundamental to who we really are than that. No question is more important or more basic. He does not ask him if he is a great speaker or a great people person. He does not inquire about his seminary training or Bible knowledge. He does not analyze his personality to see whether he has the people skills to do the job. All those factors are important but the starting point is love.

The one basic qualification for ministry is found in this most probing question from Jesus, "Do you love me?" That is the only motive for ministry that will endure the test. He doesn't even ask, "Do you love people?" Ministry does not begin with a love for people. It begins with a love for God and that love overflows to people. If we minister only out of a humanistic love for people we will be people-pleasers rather than a God-pleasers. Everything begins with a holy love toward the Lord. Nothing will keep ministry on course like a deep love for the Lord.

On December 14, 1996, the grain freighter Bright Field was heading down the Mississippi River at New Orleans, Louisiana, when it lost control and veered toward the shore. The boat struck a riverside shopping mall. 116 people were injured. The impact demolished parts of the wharf that housed over two hundred shops and restaurants and the Hilton hotel. After a year-long investigation, the Coast Guard reported that the freighter lost control because the engine shut down. The engine shut down because of low oil pressure. The pressure was low because of a clogged oil filter. The oil filter was clogged because the mechanic had failed to maintain the ship properly. So, failing to change a small oil filter wiped out a mall and injured 116 people.

The same is true of love. Everything we are depends on it. With love God can use us but without love we are nothing. Paul put it this way:

1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

This passage says that love is everything. Without love you ARE Nothing (vs. 1). Without love you ACHIEVE Nothing (vs. 2). Without love you ACQUIRE Nothing (vs. 3).

You know what I find very encouraging about Jesus' question? Anybody can love the Lord. You don't have to have a great, charismatic personality. You don't have to have a high IQ or be athletic or even be good looking. Everybody in this room can qualify on this most important issue of all. Love comes first.

Years ago there was an elderly woman in New Jersey named Dorthea Clapp who lived across the road from a local high school. She would sit at her window every day and pray for the students. There was one student in particular she prayed for, a boy who lived next door. She put him on her Holy Ghost hit list and would pray daily that he would be saved. At one point she gave him a Gospel of John. After praying for him for years one day God moved him to attend a Billy Graham meeting at Madison Square Gardens in New York and he became a Christian. Within a year over 200 of his classmates had also come to faith. That boy's name was George Verwer. He went on to form Operation Mobilization - one of the largest missionary movements in the world today. Only God knows the number of people that have been impacted globally by that ministry today. It all started with an ordinary woman who loved God and used what she had for His kingdom.

For those who understand the Greek language there is in this passage a difference between Jesus' use of the word AGAPAO and Peter's use of the word PHILEO. I am not sure if this is really the main point. I don't think Jesus was playing a word game. He is probing the center of Peter's heart and calling forth the highest motive for sacrificial service unto God.

The night before Jesus crucifixion Peter had claimed a higher devotion to the Lord than all the other disciples. He had said:

Matt 26:33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

This time Peter makes no boasts and no comparisons. He doesn't claim to be better than anyone else. His previous failure was still too close. Peter simply submits his answer to Christ's omniscience "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." There is brokenness in his voice. The tone is completely different.

Why did Jesus press the question three times? Perhaps he was giving Peter a chance to affirm for each time he had denied. Perhaps He is simply emphasizing the importance of the issue. Jesus does not focus on past failures or even upon past successes but upon current realities. My qualifications for ministry today is the love I have for the Lord in my heart now. If I do not love Him I will not serve Him with all my heart.

3. RESTING in Your Calling – vs. 18-19

After restoring Peter, Jesus goes for a walk with him and Peter notices John following them. Full of what has just been spoken into his heart Peter asks about John:

John 21:20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" 22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

Have you ever caught yourself looking at someone else life and wondering why they have it so easy and you have it so hard? Everyone around you seems to just dance through life but you find yourself constantly struggling just to make it through another week. God has not called us to compare ourselves with other people, He has called us to obey.

In Hebrews 21:1 it says that we are to "run with perseverance the race MARKED OUT for us." Notice that God marks out the course, not us. He chooses the route and for each one of us it is different. He also chooses the talents, temperament, trials and tests that we will have and face. You cannot compare yourself to another person because you are not that person. They have their course, you have yours.

You cannot choose your calling. Your calling chooses you. You have been blessed with special skills that are yours alone. Use them, whatever they may be, and forget about wearing another's hat. A talented chariot driver can win gold and renown with his skills. Let him pick figs and he would starve. -- Og Mandino

Jesus here essentially says to Peter, "Mind your own business and I'll do whatever I decide to do with him without reporting to you."

Parents, it is important to remember that your kids are different than you. We must explain to them that while we love them and want what is best for them, ultimately it is God's calling on their life that is most important. Our plans for them must line up with God's plans for them. We can help them by modeling what love for God looks like but ultimately they must learn to love God personally and that may look a little different for them than for us, and that is OK.

Every person here has some kind of ministry calling on his or her life. We have a mission: a mandate that we were made for. God has called us to follow Him and given us the privilege of investing our lives in His sheep. Perhaps today Jesus wants to remind you of his call on your life. His calling is perfect, but it is also very costly.

A chicken and a pig walked past a church building one day when they noticed the Sunday morning sermon title posted on the outside bulletin board, "Helping the Poor." They walked a ways when the chicken suddenly came up with a suggestion. "Say, Brother Hog, why don't we give all the poor people a nice breakfast of ham and eggs?" The hog thought a moment and replied, "Sister Chicken, That's all right for you to say because for you it is only a contribution. For me, it's total commitment!"

What is your calling? God wants to build something with your life if you will let him. Let me encourage you today to review that calling. If you have failed and fallen let Jesus renew that calling in your life and rest in the fact that God wants to do something amazing in this world in and through you.

John Hyde was a missionary who went to India a little over a hundred years ago. He took many years to prepare for his ministry including hours spent trying to learn the local language. In 1892 he boarded a steamer in New York bound for India. On the Ship, John received a telegram from a close family friend. He opened it hurriedly on the deck of the ship. The only words of the telegram were, "John Hyde, are you filled with the Holy Spirit?" John's response was one of heated anger. He crumpled the paper, put it into his pocket and went to bed.

Unable to sleep, he tossed and turned all night. He arose from bed in the early morning hours and read the message on that piece of paper again. He thought, "The audacity of somebody to ask me that question, 'Am I filled with the Holy Spirit?' I have given myself to become a missionary. I have dedicated my life to this. I am leaving my home and going to another country. How dare they ask me if I am filled with the Holy Spirit?" Did they not understand all he had done to equip himself for this call? He had received a B.A. degree, studied the language, and was now on the way and was determined to pursue his destiny.

Yes, he was on his way, but Hyde's spirit was challenged by the note. After much soul searching, he fell to his knees before the Father. "O God," he cried out, "the audacity of me thinking that I could pray or preach or witness or live or serve or do anything else in my own strength and power. Fill me with your strength. Fill me with Your power."

John Hyde went on to become one of the great missionary statesmen of all time. Why? Because of the Spirit which enabled him to face the challenges of his life in the power of God. The work was very difficult and initially no one came to Christ. John was driven to prayer. Indeed, he would come to be known as "Praying Hyde." Over the years God used him to touch the nation of India and changed the lives of many people forever.

What is your calling? It all starts with loving God. May the Lord remind, renew and release that love in us today as we seek to share it with a hurting world.