

“Your Life Points to Christ”

December 17th, 2017 (St. Peter, St. Peter)

Advent 3B

John 1:6-9, 19-28

“From heav’n above to Earth I come,” the hymn says, “to bear good news to ev’ry home.” The angel that came that day knew his purpose and exactly what God wanted him to do. That angel was sent by God to the shepherds around Bethlehem. He came to bring good news, *to preach the gospel*. From the skies above the shepherds, the angel proclaimed: **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord”** (Luke 2:11). I think that few human beings probably feel as sure as that angel did about their purpose in life. When humans are born, we don’t know our purpose yet. We don’t know the reason that we are here. I would bet that many adults don’t even know exactly what their purpose is. That angel knew the reason he existed though. This morning we are going to talk about John the Baptist. John is unique because as a baby he knew exactly why God had created him and what his purpose in life was. **“He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe”** (John 1:7).

Sometimes in movies or in books you see people who are shoehorned into a position because their parents had it, or because everyone expects it from them, but they don’t really want it, so they try to carve out a path for themselves. Like in *Star Wars*, Darth Vader at one point says, “It is your destiny! Join me, and together, we can rule the galaxy as father and son! Come with me. It is the only way.” Luke Skywalker, of course, never joins him and works to bring about the defeat of the empire. It even happens in the Bible with the prophet Jonah, who admittedly has other sins that he’s wrestling with, but it all leads to him fleeing because he doesn’t want to be God’s prophet. What we don’t see from John the Baptist, though, is any reluctance. He doesn’t shy away from the job that God gave him.

John heads to the wilderness near the Jordan river and begins to preach and teach God’s Word. His job is to prepare the people for the coming Christ. Everything he does points to Jesus. John is one of those guys that wears his faith on his sleeves. Even when people come to him and question him about who he is, he doesn’t keep any of the honor for himself. He doesn’t want anyone to think that he might be the Christ. He doesn’t want anyone to think that he is more important than he really is. John knows his job. He is simply a voice. **“I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’”** (John 1:23). John is a voice with one message, “The Lord is coming.”

Those who had come out to question John came with an agenda. They were curious, but they came to find out who this man was that was leading an enormous religious movement out in the wilderness. They ask him first who he was. Latent within their question is more than just a desire for his identity. They want to know what authority he has, why he is doing the things that he is doing, what his purpose is. John seems to understand what’s behind their words, so he answers the question behind their question. **“He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, ‘I am not the Messiah’”** (John 1:20). This probably alleviated most of their worries. John wasn’t a fringe, rebel leader amassing an army in the wilderness. But, John is also saying, “It is not *I* who am the Messiah,” meaning, there is a Christ, and I know who he is.

So they ask him further questions. They want to know if he was Elijah, because they expected Elijah to literally be reincarnated before the Christ came. They wanted to know not if he was *like* Elijah, but if he was actually Elijah. “Are you the same prophet who was preaching against king Ahab hundreds of years ago?” is what they ask. John knows that they don’t understand what Malachi meant when he said Elijah would come. Because he was that Elijah, and angel from heaven said that he was and so did Jesus. He wasn’t a reincarnated Elijah, but he had come **“in the spirit and power of Elijah...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”** (Luke 1:17).

They ask him if he was the Prophet. You might be wondering which prophet they were referring to. They were referencing a passage from Deuteronomy 18, where God says, **“I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name”** (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). These people who came to question John were looking out for anything that might signal the coming Messiah. They knew a Prophet like Moses was coming, but they didn’t know who he would be. They didn’t seem to understand that the Prophet mentioned here was the Christ himself. The Apostle Peter talks about this in the book of Acts: **“But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer....For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you’”** (Acts 3:18, 22).

If you went to the wilderness to see John, to hear the voice crying out, like so many people living at that time did, it would be hard for you to find John as someone who was just in it for himself. It would be hard for you to see him as a person afraid of confrontation about God. It would be hard to see a man who lived his life without purpose, as if what he was doing wasn’t important. It would be hard to see a person who lives his life as if he didn’t truly believe what he was saying. John knew his purpose for being he knew exactly why God had sent him, and you might think that made him unique—that John the Baptist, alone among all people of all time, knew what his reason for being was.

That’s a lie, though. The devil distracts Christians with this question. He gets them to ask themselves, “What does God want me to do with my life? Why did God create me? How can I find purpose?” Then, in a masterful trick, he gets you to look at yourself. He gets you to think about the things you enjoy, the things that you feel passionate about, or maybe the things that you dislike and hate. It’s all a temptation that leads you to emptiness, because you’re looking inside yourself. But, truth, purpose, meaning—they come from outside of yourself. Now, it’s true that God wants you to consider the gifts he has given you and what you enjoy as you choose a vocation, but the devil takes that one step further and convinces you that once you have made your choice that you will finally feel fulfilled.

It’s one thing that leads to Christians who on the outside look exactly the same as unbelievers. They go through the same motions, and if you compared them to someone with no faith, you couldn’t tell the difference. They go home after work, eat dinner, and watch TV. Around the supper table, there might be a quick prayer, but there’s no spiritual conversation. As they watch TV, it’s the same shows. When God’s gift of marriage is mocked, the believer and the unbeliever both laugh. When sin is glorified, neither turn to their child to say, “That’s not something God approves of.” Before bed, there’s no devotion. No one opens God’s Word. What is the difference between these this believer and this

unbeliever? It's practically nothing. This believer is nothing like John the Baptist, who called out sin, who preached into the wilderness of men's hearts pointing them to Christ.

Can you see this problem in your own life? This temptation to find by yourself what God wants for you, assuming that God has not already told you. God wants you to see that he has not made you to scramble around in the dark looking for purpose. He wants you to know the light. In fact, you have far more in common with John the Baptist than you might suspect. John knew that he was just a voice. He knew his life pointed to Christ. God put faith in his heart, even from the time he was just a little baby. That faith was confidence and trust in Christ who would take away the sins of the world. The faith that God created in John gave him purpose—not because he believed, but because of the person he believed in. By faith, his life pointed to Christ.

John's faith caused him to realize he was just a voice crying out to prepare the Lord. About the same time that John lived, there was a group of people that lived out in the wilderness. I bet that you have heard about the Pharisees, they're mentioned in our lesson, and you may have heard about the Sadducees, but there's a third group, the Essenes. They were a community that lived out in the desert, studying the Word of God. Now, they believed a lot of incorrect things, but they got one thing right. If you asked one of them who they were, and what their purpose in life was, they would have told you, "**I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'**" (John 1:23). They would have quoted the same passage that John did. That passage help them understand that they were living in such a way that their lives pointed to the coming Messiah. I think that they got that right.

Those words apply to you, too. Your life is like a beacon in the darkness that points to Christ. If you are a Christian, that is just a fact. God has put faith in your heart so that you believe in Jesus. You believe that he has taken away your sins and given you forgiveness. You trust in Christ, and your life points to him. A Christian lives differently than all the people of this world. We've been talking a lot about keeping Christ in Christmas lately, and it's appropriate that we do. It's easy to live our lives as if we are exactly the same as everyone else, but we aren't. God has given you a purpose in life, to bear witness to his Son—to testify to the light that came into the world to give light to all men, the salvation and forgiveness of sins.

Listen one last time to how much this affected John the Baptist: "He [Christ] is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:27). If we think about a task like taking off someone's sandals, we would probably think that's below us. Let a person take off their own shoes, we don't need to do it. For someone to stoop down and take off someone else's shoes shows humility. John came to realize that action wasn't below him. In fact, it was something that he didn't deserve to do. John knew Jesus was so great that he didn't deserve to do the work that he was doing, and what he was doing was far more than just taking off Jesus's shoes. John was honored to point to Christ. It's an honor for us as well. At Christmas, we realize how honored we are to point to Christ. It's why we spend so much time worshiping him this time of year. God has honored us beyond what we deserve. We aren't worthy to come into his house and hear the message of his Son's birth, much less be invited into the family of God to lead lives that point to him. But, your life does point to him. Live like it does. Amen.