

**"YOUR PURPOSE DETERMINES YOUR MISSION"**

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8

Two Sunday's ago the American Football League Championship game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Baltimore Ravens was said to be one of the hardest hitting games ever. Bodies were flying and people like Heinz Ward of the Steelers was limped off the field with a strained ACL and Willis McGhee of the Ravens was being carted off the field on a stretcher after one of the most bone crushing hits placed on him by Ryan Clark of the Steelers.

For those who saw the game maybe you jumped out of your chair, as I did, when rookie wideout Limas Sweed of the Steelers dropped a sure touchdown and then laid on the ground, as if injured.

As the magazine *Sports Illustrated* reported this week, "Replays showed the only injury was to his pride. But when Sweed was slow to rise, the Steelers had to take their last timeout—one they'd wish they had when the clock ran out before they could attempt a field goal."

So get the picture, Limas Sweed is on the sideline with Steelers coach, Mike Tomlin. How do you think that conversation is going? Do you think Coach Tomlin ordered up for his rookie wideout some DomPeirion or a comfortable chair to sit in? Maybe other teams might do that but not the Steelers. Let me finish what the article, written by Peter King said, "After Sweed finally walked off, to 65,350 boos [for those that don't know the game was played in Pittsburgh], he was met at the sideline by a livid Mike Tomlin. For 10 seconds the coach blew up, and the wide out took it. 'I wasn't mad because he dropped the ball,' Tomlin said later. 'That kind of mistake can happen to anyone, I was [ticked] that he'd lay on the ground, fake an injury and cost us our last time out. My point was, 'Be a man! Grow up!'" And listen to this- "Three plays later Sweed was back in the game and delivering a ferocious block on cornerback Corey Ivey, enabling tight end Heath Miller to gain an extra yard or two." What happened during that exchange between Coach Tomlin and Limas Sweed?

He attempted to get Sweed refocused, not thinking about his dropped touchdown pass, but on the game, getting points on the scoreboard before time runs out. Getting focused on the main purpose and goal- winning the game, which, thank heavens for me, the Steelers did.

So what does this have to do with the church? Well, sometimes a football team and the church can be pretty similar. The church has a purpose, just like a football team and ever since Jesus ascended to heaven and left the disciples and us here to continue His work we have been in the fourth quarter and the clock is ticking but we don't know when the end of the game or this world as we know it will occur. We don't know when the end will occur and so when the church is not focused on its primary purpose we can become distracted and be focused on all kinds of other things BUT the primary purpose. Wideout Limas Sweed was focused on his hurting ego and not on the team, and instead of getting up and, as Coach Tomlin said, "[Being] a man", he lost the team a time out and the chance to score a field

goal right before the half and with the goal to win the game it could have been in jeopardy had they not scored other points in the second half.

I eventually want to talk about the purpose of the church but I want to focus on the topic today, namely purpose determines mission. And to do so I want to hold up 3 biblical characters, Jesus being one, and talk about their purpose, their direction on their calling. First, **Moses- he had a heart on a mission**. We read the story of Moses in Exodus and during the episode when he comes to the aid of a fellow Israelite and kills the Egyptian taskmaster. He had become aware of his Jewish heritage and how his own people were being mistreated and on that day he went off. He was so angered that he killed the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating up a fellow Israelite. And so Moses, who, as an infant, had been rescued by the Pharaoh's daughter in the Nile River and brought into the Pharaoh's house, only to be nursed by his own Jewish mother, who had risen to prominence in Egypt has now taken the life of an Egyptian and has to flee for his life into

the desert. **And it was in this desert experience that he is confronted**

**by God in the form of a burning bush that Moses accepted God's**

**purpose for him.** Did Moses move easily into this purpose? No, he

objected and tried to dodge the responsibility. But God commissioned Moses

at the burning bush and God told Moses to go back to his people in Egypt to

bring the people out of bondage- which he did. And along the way God gave

to Moses and to the people of Israel and the world the Ten Commandments

on Mt. Sinai. And through that experience on Mt. Sinai God gave to Moses

God's master plan for God made a covenant with Israel to be their God and

to be in partnership with them in His mission to save the world. And it was

the Israelites who were to be God's representatives here on earth.

Friends, there was a struggle going on in this story but the struggle wasn't about Moses, although it would be easy to see it at face value. But the struggle was between God and the Pharaoh. Moses was just the agent, the messenger.

And yet there was a secondary struggle as Moses sought to fulfill his purpose which was to lead God's people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

God had plans for Moses, and Moses had a heart on a mission for God.

Let me jump to the New Testament and look at our second biblical character, **the Apostle Paul who was seized by God**. Paul is at the epicenter of the Christian movement because he helped to give us a picture through his writings of what the Christian community, the church, should look like. **And Paul was influenced and helped by three different cultures that maximized the purpose for which he was called.**

There was the **Roman culture**- Paul, first known as Saul, was a Roman citizen by birth and this gave him a great "in" as it related to his missionary experiences for it gave him special legal status. Then there was the **Greek culture**- This Saul later Paul was raised in Tarsus where he was schooled in Greek. And Greek was the international language of commerce of the day.

But the most important culture was his **Jewish culture**- for Saul/Paul was a

Jew and was a Pharisee, a Jewish leader. And this gave him a worldview all its own. And yet God seized Paul's heart on the Road to Damascus and this man, called Saul and a persecutor of the Christians, finds Christ and becomes Paul a leader of the Christians. Saul/Paul realized he was on the wrong side of God and had a life-changing experience found a new direction, a new purpose, a new message. And telling the Good News of Jesus Christ became his purpose in life.

The third person I want to highlight is none other than **Jesus Christ who is the heartbeat of God**. Listen to what Paul writes in Galatians 4:4, a passage which sets the stage for Jesus. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." The time had come for Christ to come; everything lined up- there was a common language- Greek; the Romans, through their military expansion had opened up a tremendous road system that joined cities along

the great trade routes. Religiously, there was a deep yearning, a hunger in a religiously bankrupt culture. And so God sent His only Son and Jesus filled the void, Jesus bridged the gap between God and humanity and provided that personal relationship that was so desperately needed.

It was at the age of 30 when Jesus burst onto the scene with His baptism by John in the River Jordan, followed by Jesus' wilderness experience where His purpose was sealed. His purpose was, as it says in Luke 19:10, "to seek out and to save the lost"; to save people from their sins and proclaim the Kingdom of God. And he did what He came to do- Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand and He went to a criminal's cross where He suffered and died so that those who believe in Him, might have eternal life.

Friends, Moses had a purpose, Saul/Paul had a purpose, Jesus had a purpose. The point I want to make is this- **all three: Moses, Paul and Jesus made decisions based on their purpose.**

And when you think about it, all three viewed their purpose through a variety of lenses- the lenses of circumstances, culture, language, and worldview. But the most important lens they viewed their purpose through was the lens of God's agenda for them, the lens of God's will, the lens of God's priorities. God's agenda and purpose was first and foremost, the others followed behind.

And so a few questions for us- **What is our purpose, right now, today?** And a few other questions- **What lenses do we need to look through to accomplish God's purpose? And what resources do we have to share the Good News of Christ?**

Friends, God has a purpose for each of us, God has a purpose for this church. So how do we apply what I have just shared to the church? My final point is this- **Apply the principle of PURPOSE to the church- what is the primary purpose of the church?**

When we get our hands collectively around the purpose of the church we will not have time to focus on trivial issues like the color of carpet or paint or, and I don't want to get too radical for you, the time we have let say, Christmas Eve Service, although that has never been an issue since I have been here- but you get the point, don't you? The time the service is important to a point but not compared to the purpose of the church- **reaching people for Christ.** Is the kind of music we play and sing on Sunday morning important? Yes, but it is not the most important thing we do and if we make it the most important thing then we are missing the purpose of the church- which is to make disciples for Christ. Does this mean that fellowship isn't important? Absolutely not. Does this mean we are no longer interested in maintaining relationships with our friends in the church? No. But it does mean we will be willing to get to know new people, to welcome them and fellowship with them. The point is this- it is about making those reasonable adjustments to appeal to the person out there who

needs to know Christ. I'm not talking radical stuff but let me ask this- why are we not willing to do for non-Christians what we are expecting and might possibly demand missionaries do? You see, we have a purpose, we have a mission and we were made for a mission- to make disciples for Christ.

When people have been given a survey and asked to select the **primary purpose of the church 3.4% said to act as the moral backbone of society. 4.1% said to teach the Gold Rule. And 57% said to provide a place of fellowship and share God's love with one another.** And so if that is the case what about evangelism and how do we bring non-believers into God's family?

Now don't get the idea that I am saying fellowship is not important, for that is not the case. We were created to be in fellowship with God and with one another and when we join a Presbyterian church we make a vow to seek the fellowship of the church wherever we may be.

But if fellowship is the primary purpose of the church then we exist for ourselves and we are no better than a country club with a country club mentality with a maintenance mentality. And our goal is to keep things running smoothly and keep everyone happy. And just think about a country club. The purpose of a country club is to keep members comfortable, happy and expect those very members to keep paying their dues to keep the country club in business. And that is a good purpose for a country club, but not for a church.

Jesus commissioned us to carry out the main purpose of the church and that is our first window- to make disciples. Our purpose determines our mission and we saw it with Moses and Paul and Jesus. What is our purpose? What is our mission? As Jesus said to, "go and make disciples." Amen.

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Introduction: Coach Mike Tomlin, Limas Sweed and getting focused on the main purpose and goal...

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Three Biblical characters- their purpose, their direction on their calling

First, **Moses- he had a heart on a \_\_\_\_\_**

It was the desert experience that Moses is confronted by God in the form of a burning bush that he \_\_\_\_\_ God's purpose for him

The struggle...

Second, **the Apostle Paul who was \_\_\_\_\_ by God**

Paul was influenced and helped by 3 different cultures that maximized the purpose for which he was called

There was the Roman culture...

There was the Greek culture...

There was his Jewish culture...

Third, **Jesus Christ who is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God**

Jesus' purpose was, "to seek out and save the lost" (Lk. 19:10) and proclaim the Kingdom of God

All three- Moses, Paul and Jesus made decisions based on their purpose

What is our purpose? What lenses do we need to look through to accomplish God's purpose? What resources do we have to share the Good News of Christ?

**What is the primary purpose of the church?**

Conclusion: Our purpose determines our mission. What is our purpose?