

# St. Paul: On The Same page

for 12.14.14 Advent 3b

## Day One: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

*<sup>1</sup>The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup>to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.*

Scott Adams, the creator of Dilbert, used to have a Corporate Mission Statement Generator on his website. It produced gems like, “Our goal is to build long term empowerment to leverage intellectual capital that will maximize stakeholder satisfaction.” The amusing thing about those random statements is that they they

sounded like real life corporate goals and yet they didn't really mean anything.

Look again at our Savior's goal, the “Mission Statement” of the Messiah.

“...to bring good news to the poor.” It was God's plan to send the Savior to those who are needy, hungry, afraid, despairing, and to give them joyful news!

“...to bind up the broken hearted.” It was God's plan to send the Savior to people who were wounded, suffering, their hearts aching. And he would bind up their heartache like a doctor binds up a wound.

Jesus' mission statement is more than vague platitudes about a nice God and a pleasant future. Jesus' mission was to bring us rescue and relief, and to fill us with joy.

God planned it. Jesus did it. Now we enjoy it. We are now like oak trees, he says, growing tall and straight. What is OUR mission?

**Prayer:** *Dearest Savior, you planned your work long before my birth. You moved nations and kingdoms to suit your purpose. And all this you did out of love for your sheep – even me. How can I thank you, Lord? Amen.*

## Day Two: 1 Thess 5:16-24

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup>Abstain from every form of evil.

Pick any one of the commands in this passage. Can you accomplish even one?

Can you *always* rejoice?

Can you pray and pray without ever stopping? Can you always give thanks?

All these are imperatives, but they are not just deeds to achieve. They are a way to live and think and be. And we can see them in our lives, not because we try so hard to do the right thing, but because we live in forgiveness, always knowing the good news of Jesus' life for us.

I have a good friend that I'm trying to learn from. He is unfailingly positive. Where I tend to find all of the faults and try to fix them.

When I pick up a book, I see every grammatical and spelling mistake, and too many errors can make it impossible for me to enjoy the book. But

although he sees those errors, he focuses more on the story and the characters. And he enjoys what the author is trying to do.

I've seen my friend when he is discouraged and sad. He's not immune to trouble. But even then he is positive that this will end well. It is for a good purpose. There is reason to give thanks.

What is Jesus like? He can certainly see your sins very clearly. But he sees you through the eyes of his love. He sees you as he has created you to be. The Bible even describes it this way: Jesus sees you like a loving husband sees his wife. Purified, spotless, radiant, and beautiful, Jesus is thankful for you even when you are not thankful for yourself.

Can you always rejoice? Maybe not. But you always live in rejoicing and prayer and thanksgiving because you always live in Jesus.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I can't seem to ever get it right. I struggle to do the right thing, to think the right thoughts, but I fail. And yet, you never fail in me. You always fill my life with peace. Help me to see it today. Amen.*

### Day Three: John 1:6-8, 19-28

*<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.<sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*<sup>19</sup>And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"<sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." "...I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness..."*

Who are you? People have often asked you that, or some politer version of that question. And you give them your name. But what does that mean? Tens of thousands of people have your same name.

How else can you answer the question, who are you? Often you'll volunteer your profession, that you're an engineer or a manager. You might say something about your family position, that you're a father or a mother. You might say where you're from. "I'm a Hoosier." Or who you like. "I'm a Michigan fan!"

In each case we are defining ourselves by our

connection to something else that is equally fleeting, equally insignificant. We, and our families and our work and our name, are here today and gone tomorrow.

But John knew who he was and what was most important about his identity. He was important because of his connection to someone who is not temporary, not transitory. He was a witness to the Light of Jesus Christ. He was nothing but a voice, but he was a voice announcing someone of great importance.

We would \*like\* to be someone special, someone with credentials, degrees, awards, or titles. But this is not what gives our life meaning. In this world you may not be very important. No one is trying to interview you, or following you to take your picture. But who are you? You are a sheep of the Good Shepherd. You have eternal value because of his love for you!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, who am I? You know. And you love me still. Make me who you desire me to be. Amen.*

## Day Four: John 1:25-28

*They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

People in movies, in sports, in politics may be celebrities because of something they have achieved, and others who are simply famous for being famous! The root meaning of "celebrity" is simply a person who is celebrated or admired.

The Pharisees, who envied John's many followers, wanted to know why so many people were coming so far out into the wilderness just to hear him preach?

Was he someone important, like the promised Messiah (the Christ)? Or was he Elijah who was supposed to come before the Messiah?

John said no, he was not famous for who he was – nor for what he did – nor even for what he said. Instead, he only wished to point to someone far more important, someone

so important that he was not even worthy to untie this person's shoelace.

It was not important if the Pharisees remembered John's name, or if anyone admired him. It only mattered to John that one person knew him. His fame was fleeting, but the love of Jesus was not.

It feels good to be recognized. If you go to a party where you don't know anyone, you feel much more alone and insignificant. But when your friend arrives, someone who is happy to see you, then you feel like you belong.

Even if you are famous, it may often seem as if nobody really knows you. But there is one who has come into your life who is so great that you are not even worthy to untie his shoes. And yet, he loves you. As important as he is, you are more important to him than he is to you. You are of greater value to Jesus than his own life!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I am nothing, but because of your love I am someone. I know I am everything to you. Strengthen my faith that you may be all in all to me. Amen.*