

From Carpenter Shop to Cross

1 Chronicles 16:8-11; Psalm 29:1-2 (Psalms Now); Mark 1:4-11

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For each one of us there are

- those “ah ha” moments that happen,
- those events that happen,
- those insights that come to us,
- those decisions that we make,

that have the possibility of changing the direction of our lives forever. We have an epiphany; we make a great discovery about ourselves or about our goals in life. Maybe it was about where you are going to live. Maybe it was about what you wanted to do “when you grew up.” Maybe it was about your life partner. Maybe it was about where you decided to volunteer.

For Jesus, who was the promised Messiah, there came a day when somehow, I think through the Holy Spirit’s revelation, He knew that it was time for Him to begin his public ministry. There must have been that deep inner stirring of the Holy Spirit that said, “It’s time.” All of his life on earth will change if He is obedient to his mission on earth.

Historical records tell us that by this time Joseph had died. Jesus had at least one earthly brother, James (who would later write the biblical Book of James) so he was not leaving his mother without an income.

I can imagine that Jesus went out to the carpenter shop for one last time to look around. The sun would have been shining in through the open window and showing the particles of wood floating in the air from where He had used the saw.

Sawdust and wood shavings, left over from his creations, were swept up in one corner. In another corner sat a chair that He had built and was waiting to be picked up by a family from Nazareth. He has lost count of the many that He has made. He is a master carpenter. Everything must be made at its best. I can imagine that He picked up the auger and the saw and the sander that He has used every day in his work as a carpenter and turned them over in his hands one last time. He feels the weight of the tools in his hands. It is nothing compared to the weight of responsibility to complete the mission for which He has come that He feels on his shoulders. The cross begins to make its weight felt.

He had earlier had that difficult conversation with his mother, Mary, telling her that He was leaving home and leaving the business to begin the ministry for which this Father, God, had sent Him. There were tears; there were hugs. He had leaned down to kiss her cheek and tried to assure her that He must be obedient. It had not been a conversation that He had looked forward to having.

Then, there was his brother James. James refused to believe what he had been told about Jesus. How could his brother who had grown up playing and studying and working side by side with him be the Messiah? James thought that Jesus must have something not quite right going on inside of Him. But James had given up trying to talk with Jesus about it.

Meanwhile, John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, was out by the Jordan River near Jerusalem calling people to repentance and baptizing them as a sign to all that they had made that decision. People came out of the cities, probably, at first, mostly out of curiosity, to see what they could see. News had spread about John. He was nothing like the Priests at the Temple or the Rabbis at the synagogues.

What *was* special about this man, John? God had declared before John's birth that he was to be a life-long nazirite, a man who was holy unto the Lord. The scriptures tell us that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born. John was born for a purpose. John's purpose was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. People had been waiting for hundreds of years for the Messiah's coming, and John was to announce that the Messiah had come. He was calling people to get themselves ready to receive Him.

As a nazirite, John was required to separate himself from his family of birth to wholly serve God. Although there was nothing that required him to remain single, we have no record about a wife. As all nazirites did, John lived a very simple kind of life, eating only food approved by Jewish law, but abstaining from meat and wine. We are told that his diet consisted mostly of eating bread made from locust bean flour and wild honey. He wore simple clothes made from camel's hair that was held in place with a leather belt. A sign of his nazirite vow to live a life that was holy unto the Lord, did not allow him to cut his hair or beard.

John and Jesus knew one another. John knew *who* Jesus was, and he was waiting for that moment when Jesus would be ready to begin his ministry. On a day, Jesus came to John to be baptized, not because He needed to repent of sins as others whom John was baptizing, but as a sign that He was committing Himself to begin the mission for which He had come.

John was overcome by emotion. Although John had known who Jesus was, I think that he had never thought about baptizing Him. He responds to Jesus' request by saying that he is not even worthy to be the lowest servant of Jesus, the one who takes off his shoes. Nevertheless, at the request of Jesus, John does baptize Him.

The scriptures tell us that when Jesus came up out of the waters of the Jordan River, there was the voice of God in heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son. In Him I am well pleased." It is the beginning of all beginnings!

Sometimes when we make commitments that we know will be life changing, we simply do not know *how* life changing they will be. For Jesus, the weight upon his shoulders has just grown heavier. The cross is now only three years in the future.

Immediately after his baptism, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for a time of prayer and fasting. Jesus will further clarify how He will fulfill his mission.

But one more thing will happen. He will be tested by his adversary, Satan. What natural timing! When we are doing so well and we feel so close to God, it is often the time when Satan moves into our lives with temptations in an attempt to trip us up spiritually and take away our joy.

Will Jesus remain committed to the purpose for which He came or will He give in to the offers of Satan for self-gratification? Jesus is able to overcome the temptations of Satan by claiming the power of God. He will not give up his mission for the fulfillment of his physical needs; He will not give up his mission for

a kingship on earth; He will not give up his mission to perform a stunt (jumping off the highpoint of the Temple) to get the adulation of all who see that He isn't injured. When Satan has failed, he leaves, and the angels of heaven come and minister to Jesus.

Commitment for some of us causes inconvenience. Commitment for some of us can exact an emotional and physical price. Commitment for Jesus will cause Him to experience every human emotion that we will ever experience, and then it will cost Jesus his life. We are never called to a commitment that God does not help us to fulfill. We have the same God who was helping Jesus. Whatever the commitment to which we are called, it is God who gives us the victory.

To what commitment has God called you? Do you have the courage to say "Yes?"

When you accept the commitment that God asks you to make, you will be able to sing the words that David asked the singers in the Temple to sing:

"Oh give thanks to the Lord,

Make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to God, sing praises to God;

Glory in God's holy name." (Excerpts from 1 Chronicles 16:7-11)

Amen.