

Intentionally, on Purpose

Text: Mark 8:27–38

Other Lessons: Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16; Psalm 22:23–31; Romans 5:1–11

Sermon Theme: When you have a purpose in life, you do things on purpose.

Sermon Goal: That my listeners more intentionally deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Jesus.

The *Old Testament Reading* lists the promises of God to Abraham and Sarah. The covenant is everlasting. The Lord will be the God of Abraham's offspring, one promise among many Old Testament promises about the Christ. The sermon, though, makes use of Isaiah 53 instead of Genesis 17, as it more directly connects to the necessity of Jesus' suffering and death.

The *Epistle* from Romans 5, especially verse 8, fits wonderfully into the *Gospel*. God demonstrated his love for us in that Christ died for us sinners. Although Paul incorporates the resurrection, the sermon will focus on the Lenten theme of Christ's suffering for us and why he must be killed. Mark does mention Jesus rising on the third day, but Peter's response indicates that Christ's Passion prediction remains the heart of the text and what Jesus must do as the Christ.

The context contrasts Jesus' words about his suffering, rejection, and death with the power he shows before and after his "conversation" with Peter. Healing a demon-possessed child, a blind man, and a deaf man and feeding four thousand people puts Jesus' divine power on display. The transfiguration occurs immediately after the text, where once again his majesty and power are manifest. Peter rebukes Jesus, and you can see why when you consider the power Jesus has shown up to this time.

There is a curious verbal exchange between Peter and Jesus in our Gospel for today. Jesus told the disciples, straight out, that he would have to suffer many things, that he would be rejected by the religious leaders of the day, that he would be killed and after three days rise again. Quite literally, Jesus was forcing the disciples to come face-to-face with death, to confront the cross. They were not ready for that; but then, no one is ever really prepared to come face-to-face with death—their own or that of a loved one. So Peter did what he was prone to do: shoot from the hip. He took Jesus aside and *rebuked* him. He called him on the carpet, chastising the Savior.

"Why, Jesus? Why you? Why now? Why at all?"

Peter was quite angry about the whole situation. Jesus was "good"—no, perfect—and he was young. Why should he have to suffer and die? And perhaps, if he had to do this, so would the disciples. Why? The cross makes no sense whatsoever.

"Implore the Father! Find another way! Don't make yourself go through this and don't make us do it either!"

You see, like Peter and the rest of the disciples, we have a false notion of what suffering means. For we have in mind the "things of men," not of God. The human mind reasons that suffering is bad because suffering is painful. Suffering must be punishment. Suffering is something we should not have to endure. And, for sure, suffering is not something that the Son of God should have to endure.

Oh, but that's when we need to have the mind of God. For Jesus did have to suffer and die, to pay the price for our sin. Jesus did have to endure the pain and disrepute of the cross, to pay the price for our sin. Jesus had to come face-to-face with death—his own—to pay for our sin.

Moreover, says Jesus, the disciple cannot expect a fate different from that of the Master. Only in that context are we able to say in the midst of our loss, not in anger but in faith, "If Jesus, why not me? If Jesus, why not now? If Jesus, why not at all?" "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"

When you have a purpose in life, you do things on purpose. If you have a goal, a reason, an aim in life, then you are going to do things intentionally to reach that purpose or goal.

So what do people say might be a goal in their life? Well, one goal might be to make money so they can do what they want to do, go where they want to go, buy what they want to buy. They want to have enough financial resources to have a nice house, a car to drive, or a comfortable retirement. So they get a job, they work, they do things intentionally in order to accomplish that purpose of making money.

Some people might say that they want power to be able to control their lives, to take charge of who they are and what they get to do and say. They want to say something and have other people do things for them. Some people simply want to have that control, those “take charge” opportunities in life. So they will do things to make that happen.

Other people want to be popular. They want to be liked. They want to be a part of the group. They want to be included. They want a certain prestige and to be looked up to. So they will do things intentionally, on purpose, to reach that goal.

When You Have a Purpose in Life, You Do Things on Purpose

to reach it. So what is *your* purpose in life?

Before you answer that, what happened to Jesus in this Bible passage?. He’s on this road to Caesarea Philippi, and he asks the disciples, “**Who do people say that I am?**” (v 27). He gets the answers: “John the Baptist come back from the dead.” “One of the prophets.” “Elijah.”

Then he turns it on those who are with him. “**Who do you say that I am?**” Peter, speaks up and says, “You are the Christ” (v 29). Great answer. Wonderful answer. But he’s got the wrong idea about what the Christ would do. The Christ, the one whom God’s going to send—well, Peter thinks this is going to be somebody with power to make his dreams come true. He’s hoping that the Christ will overthrow the Roman government so that they can be free, so there will be no more oppression. He believes that the Christ will show incredible political and military power. As for money and possessions, this Christ will give them a country where everybody will be safe, they can have whatever they want, and they will be able to do whatever they want. It will be a wonderful place to live, with no worries. What’s more, the disciples will get prime spots, prestige, and people looking up to them. They’ll be welcomed and well liked.

But that’s not the type of Christ Jesus had to be. He had to correct this false understanding of what the Christ will do and what purpose he has. So he says, “**The Son of Man *must***” (v 31). The word for *must* in Greek is just three letters long. It’s only a *d*, an *e*, and an *i*—*dei*. It means “it is necessary.” It has to happen. It must occur. **The Son of Man *must* be rejected. He *must* suffer. He *must* be killed.** So Jesus has this purpose in his life.

Now the question is, why does he have to do this?

First, because the Old Testament says it’s going to happen. We go back to Isaiah 53, and that Old Testament prophecy simply describes the Christ as one who will be despised and rejected. He was esteemed not. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. He bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. With his stripes, we are healed. He was oppressed and afflicted, and the Lord laid our iniquity on him. The Old Testament spoke it, and so it must happen to Jesus for him to be the Christ.

A second reason why this must happen is because God has given him a certain mission. He has to live up to his name. His name is Jesus, **the one who saves**. God has given Him purpose, this mission, this task to Jesus. He is to save his people, to forgive them, to reconcile them with God. We heard in the Epistle that God demonstrates his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The result: we are reconciled to God. Why must Jesus be rejected? Why must he be killed? Why must he suffer? Because he has this purpose in life: he has to reconcile us to God, forgive us, and give us salvation.

Now don't think that any of these things that happened to him happened because the Romans were in control. Sure, they might have had political power, and they were in charge of the crucifixion. But they weren't the ones in control. As for the Jewish leaders, those scribes and Pharisees and chief priests, they weren't in control either, even though they ran the trial. Even Peter, when he tries to stop Jesus by saying, "This will never happen to you!" he is not in control either.

Jesus is the one with the power. Jesus is the one doing everything intentionally. Just before this incident, Jesus healed a blind man and made a deaf man hear. Jesus has fed thousands of people with fish and bread. He's cast out a demon from a young girl. Right after this text, Jesus is going up a mountain to be transfigured with all his power and glory on display, dazzling white light for Peter, James, and John to see.

Later, when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night when he is betrayed, the mob comes to arrest him. Peter impulsively pulls out a sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus says, "Stop, don't you realize I can call down a dozen legions of angels to protect me?" Jesus allows himself to be arrested. When he stood before Pilate, the Roman governor, he could have said some things and gone free, but he stays silent. He is going to be crucified on purpose. When he is with the Sanhedrin, those religious leaders, they ask him a question: "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" Jesus says, "I am." I am is the name God gives himself in the Old Testament. So, when Jesus claims that name, he has forced their hand. He is guilty of blasphemy in their eyes. They will condemn him to death.

Yes, Jesus could have stopped his arrest, his suffering, his trial, his execution at any time he wanted to. He was the one who was in control. Yet, he had a purpose. Everything he did was intentional. He did all this for you, for me. To forgive us. To save us. To make us brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, having heard Jesus' purpose, and what he did on purpose, let's go back to the question for you: "What is *your* purpose in life?" Of course, you can have a number of them. I'm not going to boil it down to just one. But we do have a clear purpose given at the end of our Bible passage for this sermon: we're to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Jesus. What might that purpose of denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Jesus look like? Here are a few examples I came across.

The first one has to do with public service announcements, from a number of years ago. The Ad Council put them out. In one, a man climbed up some stairs on crutches. A voice then told the viewer that the man would have learned to walk if only someone had given the money to build a rehab center. A similar commercial showed a woman alone in a room. A voice told the viewer that this woman almost received a meal and a visit from someone. But she didn't. The point of these ads was to help people realize the good they can do that would not happen if they do not give of their time and money. So what do we do when we deny ourselves and follow Jesus? We give. We give of that money we may have worked so hard to get so that we could buy what we wanted for ourselves. We give of time, even though we will get little fame for doing so. We do this on purpose.

I read some research that was done by studying obituaries. Over the course of a number of months, the researchers read through a couple thousand obituaries. What were they looking for in those obituaries? They wanted to know what words were used most often to describe people's lives. Guess what the number one word was: *help*. The word that was used most often was *help*. People weren't remembered for their position or popularity or power or how much money they had. They were remembered because they helped others. They helped veterans or the disabled or some organization. To follow Jesus is to be remembered as someone who intentionally helped, who took up the task of loving a neighbor as Jesus has loved us.

When you get a driver's license, or if you already have one, you have an opportunity to be an organ donor and literally give of yourself when you die. Think of the number of people that your tissue could help right after death. When you intentionally checked that donor box on your driver's license.

But you don't have to die to be able to give of yourself. The Red Cross Blood Drive is an example where you give the gift of life. I have given, but others have given many more times than I have. But once again, do you see what's happening? We show something we can do on purpose that Jesus has called us to do: to follow him and give of ourselves for someone else, to deny what we may want and instead give away what someone else needs.

***Illustration:** I saw a video of a boy, maybe about ten or eleven years old, who couldn't walk normally. He certainly couldn't run fast. His arms weren't coordinated. But he loved baseball. One time he and his dad were sitting in a park. They were watching a pickup game of baseball with some kids about his age. What happened next touched my heart. The kids stopped the game. They came over and asked if he would like to play. Oh, he wanted to play! They put a bat in his hand, and the pitcher got up real close. He just lobbed it to him, so the boy was able to hit it. It didn't go far, but when the pitcher got the ball, he, intentionally, threw it over the head of the first baseman. They told the boy to run to second. Of course, the next throw was, intentionally, thrown over the fielder's glove into the outfield. So the boy ran around the bases and crossed home plate. He had hit a home run. Now, everybody there knew that they had let him hit the home run. But the real gift at that moment was that everybody was cheering. The real gift was that he was included, that he belonged, that he was welcomed into the game.*

I'm not sure what social media you're on. Perhaps you can like somebody on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram. *But what you can do is be the one to keep someone from being left out or bullied. You can be the one intentionally to include someone, to welcome someone on purpose. To follow Jesus is to include others just as he did, just as he did for you (Mk 8:34).*

See how this works? You do something on purpose because you have a purpose in life. As Christians, our purpose in life is to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus. Why? Because Jesus had a purpose. On purpose, he suffered. It was necessary for him to die. He had to be killed and then rise again. He did all this intentionally for you and for me, all to give us life and to give us a clear purpose for the lives we live each day. Amen.