



What Matters Most!

What Is Your Biggest Priority?

When I first became a pastor of a small church in California, I had a big challenge ahead of me. The congregation had been without a pastor for nine months and the previous one had a rough go of it. The church had not baptized anyone for a few years and attendance was dropping. Without any real training in seminary on how to lead a church in this situation, I had to quickly assess the issues facing the church and decide what the biggest priorities were. Should I put my focus on outreach or building up the spiritual depth of the congregation? Were there any important changes that needed to be made regarding how the church did ministry and should I try to implement them? How did I need to spend my time? What were the most important things for me to do? You might be facing questions like that now! What should I emphasize? What is the best use of my time? What priorities should I prioritize? How can I make the most of this life?

Jesus had much to say about life and how to make the most of it, but it was not quite what you hear from life coaches and success teachers today. Let's look at just a few of His statements. **For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.** (Matthew 16:25 NIV) He then goes on to ask us, "What good is it to gain your life and lose your soul?" Jesus is insisting that there is a right way and a wrong way to prioritizing how you live. You of course know that. Whether you are young or old, at some point you realize that it matters what sort of life you put together. William Shatner, the actor on Star Trek insisted that it does not matter what you do with your life, life is without purpose or direction. He is wrong. Your life is precious and of incalculable value. But you must factor in death if you are to make sense of your own life. Jesus put this juxtaposition of life and death another way when He insisted, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** (Matthew 16:24 NIV)

This is not some morbid philosophical take; it is Jesus' clear recognition of what sort of life matters, it is one that dies in a sense. At another time Jesus explained why He had to die, using the metaphor of a seed. **I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.** (John 12:24-25 NIV) When a seed is planted, it breaks apart, it "dies", and becomes essentially something completely different, a plant. For eternal life to come to us, for the removal of sin and death, Jesus had to die in order to create the new, the Church. He says it is similar for you. One life exchanged for a new and different one, eternal life.

The Apostle Paul spoke for all of us who have put our hope in Jesus Christ for salvation. **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** (Galatians 2:20 NIV) This is an astounding revelation. Like the seed that dies, you too must die if you are to become this new being, what Paul calls a "new creation". **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV) That is precisely what is offered you. The opportunity to die to the life you had without Christ and to become a new and different species, Christ joined to you, living as part of you. It is astonishing but true. When you are what Jesus said is, "born again" or "born from above", you are transformed and made into this other sort of being, one who has Christ a part of you. You become in a sense, supernatural because literally, God is joined in you.

Let me use two examples from the Bible to give a sense of what this means for you. Both come short of how dramatically this actually impacts you, but they at least give you an idea of what this does. Before God came to Moses, he was a broken-down shepherd who had no purpose or direction in his life. He was doing the stuff of normal human beings, working, eating, sleeping, talking to his friends and family members but, it was nothing like what his encounter with God generated. When the Lord met Moses at the burning bush, He completely changed the latter's life. He was reworked into the leader of the nation of Israel and the prophet of God. Nothing could have prepared Moses for this total transformation. He never in his wildest dreams imagined what the Lord had in store for him. Joined with God in this new life, Moses led an entire nation out of slavery, was God's instrument for mighty miracles and was the presenter of the greatest code of law in the history of the world. How did all this come to pass? He met God and the Lord became a part of his life.

Consider this second example. We know absolutely nothing about Mary, the soon to be mother of Jesus before God came to her. She was a virgin. That is it! We don't know what sort of person she was, how old she was or any particular accomplishments of hers. She could easily be described as non-descript. There is nothing wrong with being non-descript; ninety-nine percent of us are. The point is that a dramatic transformation in her life occurred when she joined with God. **In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.** (Luke 1:26-31 NIV)

We all know how that encounter with God changed Mary's life. She became the mother of the Savior of the world, perhaps the most famous woman ever. You cannot know all that it means for you to be joined with Jesus, to be born again, but of this you will see. When you put your trust in Jesus for your salvation, He joins with you and literally becomes a part of you. It is then the old you, the one without Jesus dies and a new you...Christ combined with you is given birth. If you ignore Christ in you, pay little or no attention to Him, it will seem as if there is not a new you at all. Many Christians live this way. It would be as if Moses walked away from the burning bush like nothing happened there or Mary got up in the morning and went about her routines as if God had not come to her. We are free to pretend that God in us is nothing special. We can ignore the Spirit of Christ working in us and through us but that would be absurd. The greatest opportunity of your life is to live fully in Christ, aware of Him and doing everything through Him. Miracles take place through those who live aware of Him in them. God sized actions take place with Christ engaged with you as you go about your day. Not you singular but you plural, you and Christ living together.

A fellow came by my office the other day, someone I had not seen in a while. The first part of the week I felt a little down about my ministry, discouraged a bit about how it was going. It seemed like it did not matter much what I was doing, the hours I put into the work. This guy had a big smile on his face and announced, "I want to thank you for what you are doing. He had stumbled across one of the two-minute video devotionals I have been posting. He did not even know I had anything online. He said he was shocked when it popped up and he watched it, watched another of them and kept going through them, one after another. Then he started watching my sermons that Nick has been posting. He was so enthusiastic and quoted several of them. I thought about the possibility of others coming across them and being encouraged to try God again or turn to Him for the first time, people I do not know, people I might never meet in this life. It dawned on me, none of this work I do alone. It is always Christ in me, and He is truly the biggest part of it. You may not see all that God does in you and through you but if you keep your mind right, that you are never alone in what you do, it may become clear to you that you are doing supernatural works that have a lasting impact on the world.