Eyes on Jesus – Being the Answer

In order to understand what I want to talk about we need to be able to understand what the Gospel is and Gods plan since before the fall. If you attend Sunday Adult Ed, please bear with me as some of this will be review but its helpful for us all to be on the same page. To begin with, we will be starting in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus answers the question what is the Gospel in his own words.

Verse 1. The beginning of the Good News about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God. Just like it was written by the prophet Isaiah “I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare a way. So according to Mark the good news about Jesus links us to a story that is already midstream. The Gospel has something to do with what the prophet Isaiah said.

So, we have Isaiah in post exilic times telling the people that God says, God will return by way of a highway and send a messenger ahead of him. This is not simple. The bible is starting off by telling us that Jesus comes as the culmination of Israel’s story and the fulfillment of a promise that the God of Israel said he would come and rescue his people.

Let’s go to verse 14. After john was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. The time is come Jesus said, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. So apparently the good news is something that he just said. Which is the kingdom of God has come near.

So, apparently in Jesus’ mind, the story of the Bible and who he is and what he is here to do, and the Gospel, is not about us going somewhere, it is about God coming here. It is about something that God is doing here, that according to Jesus is the good news. You see, the story of the bible is about what God is doing in our world. We can fall into the trap of thinking that the Gospel is about me getting into heaven, about me doing good and believing the right things about Jesus and being taken up into heaven, however, the story of the Bible is about God’s activity and purposes and what God is doing in our world through Jesus. The Good News is that God’s kingdom has arrived in the person of Jesus. Which means Jesus is here to address a problem and he’s going to resolve the problem through his death and resurrection.

Let us turn to the Old Testament to understand what Jesus is saying. Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.”

They had to go far out of their way because the Edomites refused them passage (Numbers 20:14-21). In fact, to go around the Edomites, they had to turn back towards the wilderness and away from Canaan. This was obviously discouraging.

They had a reason to be discouraged but they had no excuse for their discouragement. They faced a real challenge and something that is no fun at all. Yet, they had no excuse for not trusting in God, and for not looking for His victory through it all.

The people spoke against God and against Moses. So the Lord sends fiery serpents among them that are biting the people and they are dying, dropping like flies. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. The serpent is lifted up and the judgment of their sin is forgiven.

Jesus made a remarkable statement, explaining that the serpent of Numbers 21:4-9 was a picture of the Messiah and His work.

Serpents are often used as pictures of evil in the Bible (Genesis 3:1-5 and Revelation 12:9). However, Moses’ serpent in Numbers 21 was made of bronze, and bronze is a metal associated with judgment in the Bible, because bronze is with fire, a picture of judgment.

So, a bronze serpent does speak of sin, but of sin judged and dealt with. In the same way Jesus, who knew no sin became sin for us on the cross, and our sin was judged in Him and dealt with. Jesus in being lifted up becomes God’s answer, to sin, death, satan, and evil. The point for us today is that Jesus allowed himself to be the vessel used by which God addresses something in the world. A vessel of answered prayer. God had a plan throughout all eternity for the Word to take on flesh and be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness so we could look to him for salvation and healing.

Have you prayed today for people and ministries in other areas? Have you ever considered that, in the same way, someone in another geographical area has probably prayed for a person or family or ministry in the area where you live? In answering those prayers, God may use any number of means. Many of the answers will come through the life of a believer. Could that person be you or me?

A sovereign, caring Father Our God is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). He is "the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords …" (1 Tim. 6:15). He knew Nathanael's heart "under the fig tree" (John 1:48). The Lord knew the run-away in Rome, and directed Onesimus' path to intersect with that of Paul, who led him to faith in Christ (Philem. 22). Days before an African diplomat departed for his homeland, the Lord dispatched Philip from Samaria to a remote desert road to be an answer to his prayers (Acts 8:26–27). He knows, He cares, He directs. God is always working and so we must remember three things.

1. God Has His People

When Elijah felt alone, God reminded him that He had seven thousand of His people close by (1 Kings 19:18). When a new convert prayed, the Lord chose a believer in the same town to welcome Saul into the church (Acts 9:10–11). When Paul first arrived in Corinth with no place to stay, Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to him (Acts 18:3). Later he was told, "Do not be afraid … because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9–10). Today, in the cities, suburbs, or small towns, God still has His people.

1. God Hears His People

God hears the prayers of His people. "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him…." (2 Chron. 16:9). He heard the cries of His people in Egypt (Exod. 3:7). The Lord knew of Saul, "for he is praying" (Acts 9:11, 12). He heard the prayers of a military officer and used Peter to be an answer to Cornelius' prayer (Acts 10). "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

1. God Uses People

"God … comforted us by the coming of Titus," Paul wrote (2 Cor. 7:6). The Lord often uses people to carry out His purposes. After the 70-year exile, we're told God stirred the heart of the King of Persia to allow His people to return home to rebuild the temple. He also moved the hearts of His people to carry out His plan (Ezra 1:1, 5). The same verb is also translated "stirred up" (NASB) "prompted" (TEV), "aroused the spirit" (Hag. 1:14, AMP), and "gave the desire" (LB). Nehemiah stated, "I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do …" (Neh. 2:12). The Lord stirs and prompts His people to accomplish His purposes.

If you and I today are to be usable, we need to ask ourselves the following:

Am I available, cleansed from evil things, set apart, useful to the Savior?

Am I listening for His promptings? Am I preoccupied with my agenda?

If I sense His prompting, am I willing to respond?

If I am unavailable, unprepared, or insensitive to His promptings, the Savior may use someone else, and I will miss the blessing.

One available "vessel" was John. While listening to a tape on "prayer," he heard a speaker—whom he had met previously. And he began praying for the speakers dad, an Army major, would come to Christ. John later learned that this man's father lived, as he himself did, near Washington, DC. Not long after that, while driving one afternoon, Butch noticed a man standing on the corner. Butch couldn't believe his resemblance to the speaker he'd heard! So he stopped, introduced himself, and discovered that indeed it was the speaker's father—the one for whom the family was praying.

That encounter began a friendship between John and the "Major." They met for an extended period of time, and as their friendship continued, the Major's health declined. One night John came to the Major's bedside and said, "I've been listening to your stories. Can I tell you one of mine?" He agreed, and John read the story of Nicodemus meeting Jesus in John 3. The Major trusted Jesus Christ as his own Savior. He said with a salute, "Now I'm under a new Commander-in-Chief!"

The Lord used John Hardman, a pastor in the suburbs of Washington, DC, to answer someone else's prayer.

As you are praying this week for people or ministries in other areas, you can be confident that the Lord knows all about them. He has some of His people nearby. And He hears their prayers. The Master is able to stir His vessels to minister on His behalf. At the same time, believers near you, and in other areas, are probably praying that God will do a work in the lives of people or ministries in your area. He will be looking for vessels He can use—those that are attentive, available, and useful. He will prompt and dispatch His servants to carry out His ministry. Will we be alert to His promptings? Will we be available for the Lord to use you to answer someone else's prayer?