

## **New Directions**

### **1. Christ Changed Directions**

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

This is the season of Epiphany. During this season, we look at Jesus' life and ministry, as he is gradually revealed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. This is also a new year, and this is the time to examine our lives asking, "Is God leading me in new directions?" During the next three weeks we will talk about new directions.

I want to give you a report on Christmas at the parsonage. I'm almost embarrassed to talk about it at this point. It seems so, "Last Year." Well, yes, as a matter of fact, it was last year. But I wasn't here to talk about it last Sunday. So, bear with me.

Both our children were here with their spouses and the two grandsons. Our daughter and her family's flight was delayed and we got them home very late on Christmas night. So, we had our Christmas on December 26. We sat the two grandbabies down around the Christmas tree. This is their first Christmas. They had no idea what was about to happen. I handed them each a gift and encouraged them to rip the paper off.

You should have seen the look in their eyes. These two little fellows have been born into homes full of books. They have been trained from their earliest days not to tear paper. Now, here was granddaddy trying to get them to tear the wrapping paper. They could not bring themselves to do it. I gave up and started tearing the paper off for them. They sat there and watched with the most troubled expressions. You could tell they were worried that I was about to get into serious trouble.

One day those little guys will understand that, although most of the time paper should not be torn, there are times when it is the right thing to do.

That's one of the hardest lessons in life, to understand that you can do the same thing and one time it is the right thing to do and another time it is the wrong thing to do. Some people never learn that lesson.

One time I was having lunch with a group of preachers at a Luby's Cafeteria. We were sitting around gossiping and enjoying ourselves. I hate to tell you, but when Methodist preachers get together, they gossip. Someone will ask how another preacher is doing in the church he is serving. Someone else will ask about a church, whether it is a church that is hard or easy to serve. One of the fellows finished a little ahead of us. I saw him reach into his pocket and pull something out, and I thought, "Surely that's not what I think it is." But it was. It was one of those little floss sticks, with the floss strung across a bow. Then I thought, "Surely he's not going to do that." But he did. He proceeded to floss his teeth there at the table while the rest of us were still eating. Now, I believe in flossing. It's a good thing at the right time. But at the wrong time, flossing is an abomination.

It's all about the timing. There's a right time and a wrong time to do things.

Even Jesus had to learn that lesson. When Jesus was 12 years old, he was ready to dedicate his life to teaching the world about his Heavenly Father. You remember the story of his parents taking him to the Temple. When they packed up and left Jerusalem to return to Nazareth, they discovered, after a day's walk, that Jesus wasn't with them. They returned to find Jesus in the Temple talking with the priests and teachers about God. When Mary scolded him for putting them to such worry and trouble, Jesus was surprised. Didn't they know he would want to stay in the Temple and talk to people about God?

That's what Jesus had come to do. That was his purpose in life.

The problem was that it wasn't the right time yet. The world wasn't ready to hear what he had to say. And he wasn't ready to tell them either.

Jesus went home with Mary and Joseph. That's what his Heavenly Father wanted him to do. He went home to grow up. For 18 years he listened and learned about life, about carpentry and about God. It would have been wrong for him to preach and teach and minister to people during those 18 years. It would have been the wrong time.

Then John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. God had been preparing the people and the world for thousands of years for this moment. Now, John was given the mission of making the final preparation, by proclaiming that the time had finally arrived for the coming of the Messiah.

When Jesus heard John's words, he knew it was time for his life to move in a different direction. What would have been wrong for him to do 18 years earlier was now exactly the right thing to do. During that time it was right for him to live the life of a carpenter and a carpenter's son. Now it was time for him to live as the Messiah, the Son of God.

When Jesus waded into the Jordan River and was baptized by John, he left his old life behind him and never looked back. When he walked out of the Jordan River, he was empowered by the Spirit and the Word of God to work for the salvation of the world. It was the right time.

But, just think for a moment. What if, when Jesus heard John's message, what if he had said, "No, 18 years ago my Heavenly Father told me to live as a carpenter's son, and that is what I must continue to do. That is God's will for my life?"

It sounds ridiculous to even ask that question. Yet, that is exactly what many people do.

In one of the churches I served there was a man who, as a young man had wanted to share the gospel of Christ with people in nations that would not let Christians come into their countries. He decided that the way to do that was by offering free medical care. However, he ran into roadblock after roadblock. His biggest problem was that when the countries would find out his ministry was Christian, they wouldn't give him or his medical teams visas to enter, even to give free medical care. He gave up on the idea. He decided it wasn't God's will for him. One day he was in a seaport, and he saw an old freighter for sale. He had

an idea. He could buy that old freighter, or one like it, and equip it with medical equipment and supplies and go to the ports of these countries. He and his team wouldn't need visas. They wouldn't be going on land. They would stay on the boat in the port, and the people would come to him. But the man hesitated. He thought, "No, God made it clear that was not God's will for my life." He had a steady job and a family to feed. He had come to understand this was the life God had called him to. But he prayed about it. Then the answer came. God helped him to understand that it had been God's will from the beginning that he create this ministry, but not until the right time. And now was the right time. The man bought the ship. His ministry now has a fleet of ships with doctors and medical equipment, caring for people in ports all over the world in the name of Christ.

It might never have happened if this man had not come to understand that God's will for our lives is different at different times in our lives. There are times when God calls us to move in new directions.

We have entered a new year. This is a time for personal evaluations. What changes do we need to make in our lives? Most of our New Year's resolutions have to do with eating less, getting more exercise, living a more disciplined life. Those are fine things to do, and if you have made those resolutions I hope and pray that you will keep them.

But let me suggest that as you look forward to this New Year, you ask yourself this question: Is God leading me in a new direction? What you have been doing is what God has led you to do. You have been seeking God's will for your life. But don't assume that what God called you to do yesterday is what God will call you to do tomorrow. What is God calling you to do in 2007? Not, what did God call you to do in 2006? 2006 is history. What is God leading you to do in 2007? Maybe God is calling you to continue doing what you've been doing. But don't assume it. It could be that God is calling you in a new direction. If so, and if you continue what you've been doing, you will no longer be in God's will. Listen to what God is saying to you today. Be open to the possibility that God is leading you in a new direction.

A new year lies before us. Be free to follow where God is leading you.

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