

“Changing Direction”

Matthew 3:13-17; Philippians 3:1-11

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

January 8, 2016

This morning our attention is drawn to two men who made radical changes in their lives. Neither of them merely made minor adjustments to the way they were living. They completely turned and moved in new directions.

All his adult life, Jesus had been a carpenter. He learned this trade at an early age from his earthly father, Joseph. I suspect he had been making furniture for a dozen years or longer.

He hung up his tools and closed the door behind him one evening, as he had done countless times. This time was different, though. He would not return the next day to begin working on a new piece of furniture.

Instead, he would head to the Jordan River where he would be baptized by John the Baptist. From that day on, all his talents, skills and abilities would be used in new ways.

Now, he would become an itinerant preacher. Through word and deed, he would reveal the heart and nature of his Heavenly father and teach people how to live a full and abundant life.

He would walk those dusty Palestinian roads listening to people’s stories and responding to their pleas for help with mercy and grace. He would heal their diseases and lift their spirits.

What had been important to him up to that point, making fine furniture and taking care of his family, was replaced with a different dream and purpose for living. He was headed in a new direction.

Twenty years later, a man named after the first King of Israel, Saul, had a similar experience. Few of his peers had a better life than Saul.

This brilliant man had climbed the ladder of success and was in an enviable position. He was on top of the world and seemed to be enjoying it.

He was a celebrity and received much acclaim for his achievements. He wielded a lot of power and had a great amount of authority.

Life could not have been better for Saul, or so he thought. Little did he know his life was about to change dramatically, and it could get better.

Saul had an encounter on the road to Damascus with the resurrected Jesus. His eyesight was taken from him but his vision greatly improved.

What had been important to him, climbing the ladder of religious, political and social success, was replaced with becoming a disciple of Jesus. No longer was life about him—his pedigree, ancestry, status, intelligence, notoriety, goodness or dreams—life was about knowing and following Jesus. It was about using his talents, skills, abilities, influence and intellect to make hope visible for the many people who were carrying heavy burdens and struggling to survive.

Saul's turn in a new direction was so dramatic it was as if he had been born again. The only appropriate thing to do was to take a new name, which he did. Saul became Paul and devoted his life to spreading the gospel and planting churches.

What did Jesus and Paul have in common? Both of them let go of what had once been important to them to pursue new dreams and move in a different direction.

Can you relate to them? Is it time for you to take stock of your life and future and let go of some things you have considered important to pursue new dreams and move in a different direction?

I suspect all of us have done this in the past. What is not as important to you now as it once was? Sometimes it can bring smiles to our faces when we look back at what we worried about or pursued with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

“Did we really get bent out of shape over that?” we muse. “What were we thinking?”

At other times, looking back at what we thought was so important that we could not live without it can bring tears to our eyes. How could we have been so naïve or foolish? Was it really worth the price we paid in terms of money, health and relationships?

I am intrigued by Paul’s decision to follow Christ. I don’t know that I have ever met anyone who gave up so much to be a disciple.

All his life prepared Paul to get where he was, and it was a good place to be. Everything was going his way, and his future could not have looked brighter.

How hard must it have been for Paul to let go of what he worked so hard to achieve and accumulate? Did he have second thoughts and consider turning back?

If he did have second thoughts, by the time he wrote this letter to his dear friends in Philippi they were gone. He assured his readers that following Jesus was the best decision he ever made. He had no regrets.

In the midst of turmoil, which there was no shortage of in Paul’s new life, he was at peace. This is what having the right values and priorities and pursuing the noblest dreams will do for you. It will give you peace of mind even in the midst of turmoil or adversity.

Do you think your values and priorities are focused upon the most important things in life? I believe the New Year is a good time to ponder this question.

Is it possible you are pursuing the wrong things? Have you misplaced your values and priorities? Have you climbed the ladder of success only to discover, as a friend once said, it was leaning on the wrong wall?

Is God pleased with how you are using the talents, skills, abilities, resources and influence you have? Do you need to change direction as you move into this new year?

I read about a burglar who went into a store after hours. His purpose was not to take anything but to create chaos at the store the next morning.

He spent the night changing the price tags on most of the items. He took the higher prices off of the most expensive products and replaced them with the lower price tags throughout the store.

The next day when customers arrived, they had the time of their lives. They quickly snatched up some unbelievable bargains before the owner realized what had happened.

It was said of one of our country's richest citizens in the last century, industrialist and entrepreneur J. Paul Getty, that he knew the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Could this be said of you?

How do you go about determining whether you have misplaced the price tags? How do you know if you need to move in a new direction? Do what Paul and Jesus did.

Listen to your heart.

Listen to what others are saying.

Take your eyes off yourself.

Take an inventory of how you are using all God has given you.

Identify what was important to Jesus and align your priorities to match his.

Ask God to show you what changes you need to make and to help you make those changes.

Take the first step.

I know who will join you on the second one and be with you all the way.