

Ordered #2
“Living as the Called”
John 3:27-30
5/29/16

- At the beginning of a new year, a high school principal decided to post his teachers’ new year’s resolutions on the bulletin board. As the teachers gathered around the bulletin board, a great commotion started.
 - o One of the teachers was complaining. "Why weren’t my resolutions posted?" She was throwing such a temper tantrum that the principal hurried to his office to see if he had overlooked her resolutions. Sure enough, he had mislaid them on his desk.
 - o As he read her resolutions he was astounded. This teacher’s first resolution was not to let little things upset her in the New Year.

- Last week, we started a three week series on living an ordered life and allowing God to order our steps. We looked at a passage of Scripture written by the apostle Paul that was pretty much his resolution every day of his life. This resolution wasn’t one that was made at the beginning of the year only to be forgotten. It was one that he lived by and it is one that we should live by. It’s in **Philippians 3:12b-14**.
 - o What Paul is describing is a life of order. He does one thing and because he is focused on forgetting what is behind and focusing on the heavenly reward found in Jesus, his life is ordered. It makes sense. It isn’t chaos ridden or stressed or busy just for the sake of being busy. He is allowing God to order his life as he focuses solely on pursuing Christ.

- When we focus solely on pursuing Christ, then we can live in the reality of our theme verse found in Psalm 37:23-24 which say, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.*
 - o When our steps are ordered by God because we are focusing on him and pressing forward to pursue him, then we don’t have to live in chaos or feeling squeezed or like at any moment, the fifty plates we have spinning are going to come crashing down. The Lord holds our hand as he orders our steps and delights in us.
 - o That sounds so wonderful!

- Last week we looked at our busy, driven lives. We talked about driven-ness being out of control and danger signs to look for to see if your busyness or driven-ness is out of God’s order for living.

- We often think of driven people as the ones who accomplish things. But, if we are doing the driving of our lives and if our driven-ness is driving us away from God, we have a real problem. We are living out of God's order.
 - Last week, we looked at the life of King Saul who was driven by his power and position which led him to disregard God's order and command for him.
- There was a group of guys, and one guy in particular, who accomplished some of the most important things in the world, but they were anything but driven.
- Think of Jesus' 12 disciples. Jesus looked past so many "high-rollers" to pick this band of seeming misfits.
 - There were more qualified, more educated, more talented, more motivated ones. But, Jesus must have sensed something different about the 12 that He knew could be cultivated.
 - The Disciples weren't "driven", but they were "called." There's a big difference. God's idea for ordered living is not that we living as driven people, but that we live as his called people.
 - Scripture is full of people who may not have been the most qualified, but they were called by God and they lived the dream of an ordered life.
- Then there's the guy who we are going to really look at today: John the Baptist. This morning, as we look at John the Baptist and his life, we are going to see the differences between being driven and being called. We are going to see what an ordered life, called by God and focused on Christ looks like compared to what driven-ness will do to us.
- The first difference between the called and the driven is that **called people know their place.**
- See, John was the direct opposite of King Saul when it came to knowing his place. If you remember from last week, Saul was driven. He was hungry for power. He was consumed with himself and his plan. He would even go against God to try to preserve himself.
- Even though Saul was told by Samuel, God's prophet and spokesperson that he was going to be replaced as king, Saul would not give up trying to hold on to the throne.
 - Saul saw David coming on strong to be the new king and he reacted in violence. He chased David all over the desert trying to kill him as if he could undermine God's plan. What arrogance!
- Now, there were some similarities between John and Saul. One of the things that was similar is that they both had powerful personalities which put them both in positions of prominence. Being called doesn't mean that you are wimpy or are destined to live in humiliating conditions. It means you draw your power and your strength from the source of power and strength, not from yourself.

- John had a powerful personality in that no one was neutral about John. You either loved him or hated him. One of his haters eventually removed his head!
 - Like Saul, John spoke well. The difference was John spoke of someone other than himself. John knew his place. Like Saul, John had a goal and a purpose for his life. The difference was that John's goal and purpose centered around Jesus while Saul's centered on himself. John knew his place.
 - John knew that Christ came first and he was a very distant second.
- See, John, the prophet, was to be overtaken by Christ. John would no longer be on center stage. Instead, Jesus would take over.
- How does he react? The first time he sees Jesus, John says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
 - From the time that Jesus started his ministry and started to become more popular, John's influence and ministry started to decline. That's because John's whole purpose was to prepare people for Jesus' coming. When Jesus came, John's message was complete even while he still pointed people to Jesus. Yet, people didn't need John to point them to Jesus when they could go to Jesus themselves.
 - John's popularity declined to the point that even some of his own disciples questioned John's seeming decline and encouraged him to do something about it.
 - At one point, Jesus started baptizing people and everyone was going to Jesus to be baptized instead of John. John's disciples didn't like that. After all, John was the Baptist, not Jesus.
 - So, in John 3, it records how they went to John to tattle on Jesus.
- Check out John's response in **John 3:27-30**, "John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' ²⁹It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."
- If you have your own Bible, you might want to highlight or underline that last sentence. That is the essence of a called person.
 - John knew his place. His place was to decrease so that Christ could take first place both in his life and in the lives of everyone. Called people are people who know their place and are filled with humility, strength, confidence to be content decreasing so that Jesus might increase.
 - More of Jesus, less of me is the heart's cry of called people.
- **The second difference between the called and the driven is that called people can't be blown.**

- Gordon MacDonald, in his book, *Ordering Your Private World*, which is the inspiration for this sermon series, says this, “Driven people often project a bravado of confidence as they forge ahead with their achievement-oriented life plan. But often, at the moment when it is least expected, adversities and obstructions conspire, and there can be personal collapse. Called people, on the other hand, possess strength from within, a quality of perseverance and power that are impervious to the blows from without.”
- I like that last sentence that called people possess a “quality of perseverance and power that is impervious to the blows from without.”
 - Wow. Isn’t that what you want out of your walk with Christ? That’s how I want to be described!
 - This is what James was talking about in James 1:6b-8 when it says, “*Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.⁸ Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.*”
- Unblown is how John lived. No matter who opposed him. No matter what the risks were for offending even those in great power. No matter what came, he knew the calling of God on his life and was impervious, he was able to resist anything that came against him.
 - John, if you remember, directly stated that the king was in violation of God’s law when he married his brother’s wife, Herodias. From then on, Herodias was out for John’s head, literally. Talk about not being blown. He didn’t have to say anything about the king. He could have turned the other way and kept his mouth shut!
 - In those days, you just didn’t talk about the king and get away with it. But, God told him to speak and he spoke and called the king out. He could not and would not change his message for people to “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!” That message of repentance was for the king as well!
- Called people aren’t blown about by any passing idea or trend or fad or outside pressure. Called people aren’t even blown about by the trials, valleys and hard times of life. Instead, they are steadfast and firm in their calling and in their trust for God.
- **Third, called people understand stewardship.**
 - People seem to think that Jesus’ increased fame would rattle John. John’s big crowds are fading as Jesus’ are building. Even John’s disciples are leaving him to follow Christ and he was encouraging it!
 - That’s because John understood stewardship. John knew that the crowds were never his. John knew his position was never his.

- John knew that he is a steward and a steward's job is to simply manage what the Owner possesses. A steward's job is to do the will of the one who possessed his life and who gave him the calling. John already gave his life to God to possess and so he would be fine with anything that God said for him to do.
- How different this was from the driven Saul. He thought the crown was his. He thought the power was created by him. He thought his life was his. So he fought to keep it all to the bitter end.
 - Are you a steward who knows who possesses your life or are you driven to possess and drive your own life?
 - Who owns your career? Your family? Your health? Your income, possessions and assets? Driven people think they own them.
 - Called people know we are only stewards and managers and are willing to give all those things over to God for him to direct and order for we trust the promise that he always holds the hand of those who submit to his order and calling.
- Cardinal Danneels of Brussels made the following statement about his high position as cardinal in the Catholic church. He said, "When I get home after a long day, I go to the chapel and pray. I say to the Lord, "There it is for today, things are finished. Now let's be serious, is this diocese mine or yours?" The Lord says, "What do you think? I answer, "I think it's yours." "That is true," the Lord says, "it is mine." And so I say, "Listen, Lord, it is your turn to take responsibility for and direct the diocese. I'm going to sleep."
 - I walk through this church and I am fully aware that this is the Lord's church. His church, his people, his budget, his bank account, his ministry, his challenges and his victories.
 - I'm just offering my life as a steward for his service and for him to possess. It can't be any other way.
- Next, **called people know who they are.** Knowing who you are begins with knowing who you are not.
 - Many thought John was the Messiah. He heard it every day. It would have been easy for him to start to believe what others said – he was Elijah come back to life, he was the Messiah.
 - But John was steadfast. He said, "*He that is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to tie his sandals.*"
- This may seem simple, but today it is more important than ever before. Many leaders make the mistake of believing their own press clippings, whether those are good or bad. When leaders will only listen to one or the other they then either live with an inflated sense of self if they listen to the good stuff or burnout through depression if they listen to the bad stuff

- I decided long ago not to do this. I am neither as grand as my greatest cheerleader, nor was bad as my fiercest critic.
 - You know, there are a few people who think I'm the next best thing since sliced bread. You know, sliced bread is a pretty good thing! There aren't many, but there are some who think this about me!
 - Then, there are those who think I don't know what in the world I am doing. They disagree with what I'm doing and how I'm leading. They question my motives and my methods.
 - Here's the deal...I can't listen too much to either one or else I will either get puffed up with pride or beat down with discouragement. It's the same with all of us.
- I just want to be what God called Angela Sagesse to be. Yes, I want to be transformed, but, I want to be transformed into Christ's image, not someone else's. And, I need to be content in what God called me to be. He didn't call me to be anything other than Angela Sagesse. He didn't call you to be anything other than you.
- Oh, I tried being someone else many years ago. It didn't work out. I wanted to be the Christian rock version of Sandi Patty. I went to Anderson University, in large part, because she went there and was a vocal performance major. I dreamed of having the same voice professor that she had. I didn't even get into private voice lessons!
 - Here's something else, I tried out three years in a row to sing a special at chapel. Every Tuesday and Thursday, we had chapel at AU and all students were required to go. I never was selected to do a special solo in chapel – never. At the time, it was devastating. I gave up singing for several years. Now, when I look back, I believe it was because I was trying to sing in the way I thought the music department was looking for. I wasn't singing to glorify God, but to be something that someone else wanted.
 - I failed to realize that someone else's calling was not my calling. I couldn't be Sandi Patty. I couldn't fit into the mold of the music department of AU. When I tried, I certainly failed. I needed to just focus on glorifying God in worship! And, now I know that God was calling me to another area of ministry.
 - And, I've seen other pastors try to emulate more famous pastors. Maybe you've seen them, too. Saying "ah" at the end of sentences, carrying sweat towels like T.D. Jakes, using catch phrases of other pastors. Now, I have used illustrations and outlines for sermons written by other pastors. But, I have to make them mine or else they are going to come across as phony.
 - I've decided to be the best ME this world has ever known!!! I can be the best me by focusing on Christ rather than focusing on anyone else.
- Isaiah 43: 1 – 5 (NKJV) says this, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called*

you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, ...4 Since you were precious in My sight, You have been honored, And I have loved you...5 Fear not, for I am with you."

- When that's the Lord's promise to us and we trust it, we then can free ourselves to be ourselves and keep the right perspective about ourselves. When we know that the Lord loves us, has called us, that we are precious in his sight and honored by him, just because we are his child, we are set free from trying to be anything other than his child.
- **Finally, called people understand commitment to God's plan, not their own.**
 - John's commitment was: *"He must increase, but I must decrease."* He wanted more of Christ and less of himself. John was willing to give it all away for Jesus.
 - Saul, on the other hand, wanted it to be all about him. He was not willing to even think about another king.
- Too often, we think that no one can do what we are doing as good as we are doing. When we think that, then begin to hold on to our plans rather than to God's plans.
 - Gordon MacDonald shares a story in "Ordering Your Private World" of an English headmaster who was approved when he was 45. His first act was to write himself a letter to be opened on his 65th birthday.
 - He wrote, "Today you are 65, and it is time to give the task of being headmaster over to a younger person. You will tell yourself that there is no one who can replace you; that the school cannot do without you. But don't believe this self-aggrandizing propaganda."
 - When he turned 65, he actually argued with himself. But eventually he took his own advice and gave the leadership over to a better man. This is not to say that 65 is old or that you should quit at 65. This is not to say that you are not useful when you are older.
- The bigger point is that we sometimes have trouble realizing that God can handle it without us. Sometimes, we have trouble realizing that God's plans are still God's plans when the methods change because the message will always be the same. Sometimes, we have trouble accepting change because the change wasn't initiated by us and we don't like it. Sometimes, we have trouble when God starts mixing things up without consulting us! As if he should!
 - You see, on the surface it seems like selfishly driven people are committed too. But their commitment is to their plans, their dreams, & their ego.
 - Called people are committed to God's plan no matter how it turns out or what their role in it is. We always have to be willing to get out of the way so God can use someone who can do it better than we can or who can take us to the next level. And, we always have to be willing to do the will of God,

- not our own.
 - This is what Jesus did when he prayed the night before his crucifixion, *“If it be your will let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.”*
 - And, this is the same commitment level that we see in John the Baptist.
- So, which would you rather? To live as the called or to live driven by your own plans, press and power? I want to be “called” like John, but how do I get there? How did John get there? Let’s take a look at one little Scripture with three little words that make a huge impact.
 - It’s Luke 3:1-2, *It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler^[a] over Galilee...Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness (or the desert.)*
- Did you catch that? Something amazing just happened. In order for John to receive his calling, John had a desert or wilderness experience.
 - Caesar is in Rome ruling the world. Herod is ruling Galilee. High priests Annas and Caiaphas are in Jerusalem living the good life at the expense of organized religion.
 - Where is John????? In the desert wilderness. What happens in that desert that it’s so important? That’s were God spoke to him! God took him out of everyday life to a place where he could speak and were John could listen.
- We have it so backwards today. We think the person on the big stage, from the big spot must be hearing from God. If only that were true, we wouldn’t have any problems during this political season, right?
 - But, that isn’t God’s way. No, God speaks to us in the desert! Consistently throughout Scripture when God wanted to get someone’s attention, to call them, he would take them to the desert.
 - Why a desert? Maybe it’s because everything else is dead and His is the only voice to hear.
 - Deserts are painful places. Desert places in our lives are places of isolation, suffering, pain. But it’s a place where God builds the inner person. Look back on the areas of your life where you were in a dry place, where there was some suffering and pain. Those might just be the places where you grew the most in God.
- That’s because, in the desert I learn dependence on God.
 - Everything else I’ve leaned on is gone and I am forced to trust Him. Before then, it’s just empty bravado. Remember, trust is not really trust until it is tested.

- Could it be that God would allow some things in your life to DIE so you can hear Him? Could it be that some things you are holding on to so tightly, God is trying to pry from your hands and is taking through a desert experience so you can see how you need him more than you need what you are holding on to?
- ***In the desert I can think, plan, and prepare as I hear God speak.*** We all know that we need quiet times of refreshing, but we seldom take those times. The desert forces us to slow down and hear His voice. Listen, if we won't take the time to hear God, he will make sure that we do.
 - I read in a devotional to thank God for the times when you are forced to slow down – like time of sickness or injury. When I read that, I was like, “What??” I see those times as major inconveniences. I don't have time for this!!
 - Here's the thing, though, if you want God to work in your life and to hear his call, you have to slow down enough to hear him speak. You cannot plan or prepare for anything of any significance without hearing from God first. Your plans and preparation will amount to nothing without hearing from God first.
- ***In the desert I can be called.***
 - After the desert has purged me of my selfish motives, slowed down my frantic pace, allowed me to speak to God, re-evaluate my life...I can finally hear God's CALL on my life and I walk out of that desert in authority and power.
 - John came out of that desert and stood up to every critic – religious and political.
 - It was the same with Jesus: Lu 4 tells us Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days, then we read that he returned from the wilderness in the POWER of the Holy Spirit.
- Why should it be any different for you or me? God will still most often call us in the desert experiences of life.
 - Maybe you've been looking at the desert experience you're in as a bad thing, the most horrible thing. Maybe you have absolutely no desire to go through a desert experience. Maybe you are still bitter from a desert experience that you have been through.
 - Could it be that you look at these experiences so negatively because you are still trying to drive your life rather than accept the calling of God on your life?
- But what if you come out of it “*in the POWER of the Holy Spirit*”? Would it be worth the journey?

- I know about desert experiences. I've been in some deserts that I didn't want to go through. Some that after I got out, I could see no good in them.
 - But later, much later, I see that God brought me in and He brought me out! Because, *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."* He is bringing the good work in my life to completion and he's bringing the good work in your life to completion. Let him call the shots! Let him do the driving! Let him give the calling to your life.
- Scripture uses the phrase "and it came to pass." That is the phrase we can use for our desert experience. It didn't come to stay. It came to pass.
- It came to pass so that we could live as the called, not the comfortable. It came so we could live as the called, not the driven. It came so we could live as the called, not the independent. It came so we could live as the called, not the downtrodden. It came to pass so that we could live as the called, not the stagnant.
 - What life do you want to live?