

## **Mission**

Jeremiah 26:10-15

Author Brad Meltzer posted a series of tweets on Twitter this week. They concerned the incredible father-son team of Dick and Rick Hoyt. Meltzer first wrote about them in his 2010 book Heroes for My Son. His first tweet read, “Dick Hoyt died today. He was so nice to me when I started writing about heroes. So here is his story: When Dick and Judy Hoyt’s son was born with cerebral palsy, unable to walk or talk, the doctors told them to just ‘put him away.’ No, they decided.” A personal note: I will remind the church that I am named Mike in honor of an older cousin, Mike Greene. As a boy I saw up-close how debilitating cerebral palsy is, and what a burden it places on those who care for those stricken with it. The Hoyts’ decision to say yes to their son Rick carried a considerable cost in time and energy.

But they never wavered. Meltzer’s next tweet: “They’d push him, pull him, they’d carry him along. But he’d never be left behind. When the public schools said there was no place for Rick, his parents found a computer that would write his thoughts from the few head movements he could make.” Rick Hoyt went to school and did well.

Meltzer’s next two tweets: “In high school, Rick learned of a five-mile charity run for a newly paralyzed teenager. Rick told his father they had to do something to send a message that life goes on. Even though he wasn’t a runner, Dick never hesitated...

He'd run the race, pushing Rick's wheelchair the whole way. They finished next to last. It was a victory. That night, Rick typed out these words: 'Dad, when I'm running, it feels like my disability disappears.' Dick's mission was clear. He kept running, Rick always out in front." Dick's **mission**. We shall come back to that word.

Brad Meltzer's final tweet: "234 triathlons, 67 marathons, 6 ironmans. Rick Hoyt still can't walk. But with his father, they both fly. Team Hoyt's motto: Yes you can." An Ironman triathlon consists of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride and running a marathon's 26.2 miles. Now imagine Dick Hoyt pulling his son Rick, on a specially-built raft, through open water for 2.4 miles. Many triathlons are conducted in the ocean. So add waves to your imagination. Next Dick would load his son into a trailer, hitch it to his bike, and tow him more than a hundred miles. Finally, he would load Rick into an over-sized stroller and push him through a marathon. **And he did this six times**. In my estimation we throw around the word hero a little too loosely these days. Never have I heard of an individual to whom it better applies than Dick Hoyt. I once conducted a wedding in which the groom was an elite triathlete. He knew Dick. He said you could track where on the course the Hoyts were by listening for the roar. From start to finish they passed through a wall of vocal support as tangible as those waves through which they battled.

"Dad, when I'm running, it feels like my disability disappears." Surely all of us would feel the pull of those words if they came from a severely disabled child. But how many of us would take it to the extreme like Dick Hoyt? He did because, "His

mission was clear.” Mission means one thing to a military commander, another to an astronaut, another to the Roman Catholic friars who evangelized Mexico and the American southwest in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet all flavors of its definition have one thing in common: mission comes in response to a calling. In Reformed theology, mission means the call of God on those whom God has redeemed. We have spent Lent working through the process of reconciliation. We have spoken of how we can heal our relationships with God and one another. Through confession, repentance and forgiveness we can be reconciled.

It turns out reconciliation is just another step toward a still larger thing: redemption. But even redemption is yet another means to a greater end. God's gracious redemption of sinners comes with a calling, a mission. What that mission is varies from person to person. Yet the calling remains. Redeemed people of God: to what mission is God calling you? Find and fulfill your mission. The Prophet Jeremiah did just that—though we might judge that he probably wished God had given him an easier calling. Earlier in our chapter Israel gets a new king. Jeremiah hears God calling him to warn the royal court that Israel's leaders must stop ignoring God's laws. God specifically tells Jeremiah “do not hold back”. So Jeremiah tells them if they repent God will consider not “doing the evil I intend to do to them” If they continue in their rebellious ways God will, “make (Jerusalem) a curse for all the nations.”

Nobody likes being held accountable, certainly not powerful people who have grown accustomed to doing whatever they like. The Hebrew power people call for

Jeremiah's execution. Still he does not fail his mission. He tells them, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city..." He goes on to tell them to follow the process of reconciliation. They must confess their sins. They must repent, turn away from them and turn toward God. If they do, the Lord will forgive them. They do not, of course, but subsequent verses tell us they do at least release Jeremiah.

Missions vary, but all come as calls from God for redeemed people to serve in response to the grace of God. Thankful for reconciliation, we must do what the author of it calls us to do. For all its irreverence, the movie *The Blues Brothers* got this exactly right. Lost, perhaps, in all the comedy and great music is its plot. Two sinners hear the calling to get their old band together to hold a benefit concert. They are to use the money raised to pay off the delinquent taxes for the Catholic school they attended as boys. And, not to press the point beyond what the farce will support, the brothers absolutely understand what they're doing. What do they tell people again and again? "We're on a mission from God."

To what mission does God call you? Find and fulfill your mission. Jesus Christ has redeemed you. Listen for his calling on your life. With gratitude for his love answer that calling. The Bible overflows with calls to mission. They vary widely. Some may seem a little quirky or minor; others, like Jeremiah's, may seem so deep and dangerous we would prefer not to hear them coming at us. Here then, is a short list of callings to mission you may hear for yourself. In a few weeks we will ordain two new elders. These young women have answered the call to serve in that way. And

we rejoice in this. Other missions may include serving the church on committees or commissions. Or serving through the church but out in the community. Ramp-building for disabled persons and volunteering at a food pantry fit this bill.

Other callings do not work themselves out through the church at all—though the church can and should support people as they answer them. Parenthood is one great example, tending to the planet is another. Others could include educating; offering medical care whether as a doctor, nurse, tech, aide or even custodian. In fact, our “custodian”, Alvin Stinnett, prefers to be called the Church Caretaker, reflecting his understanding of his work as a calling. As it says on many a product label, your results may vary. But the core truth remains: God redeems people and then calls them to perform their own unique mission. Find and fulfill your calling.

The light we see coming toward us looks more and more like the end of the pandemic and the return to some form of normalcy in the near future. Here, then, are a few callings God may offer you in the weeks to come.

Welcomer. I believe that as churches resume gathering many people will, for a short time at least, have a new interest in spiritual things. After a year of isolation they will certainly seek fellowship. We offer both. Is God calling you to invite somebody you know to visit our worship services, a service project we sponsor, youth group?

Servant. Most hands-on, local mission projects have a backlog of work they

could not do during the pandemic. Is God calling you to work on a ramp build or to serve the poor through Manna from 7, or at 14<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut?

Shepherd. Solid academic studies have already appeared that document the emotional and physical cost of the lockdowns. Many people, lonely, afraid and frustrated, have turned to drugs and/or alcohol, or have experienced an acceleration of decline from pre-existing psychological conditions. Is God calling you to reach out to suffering people in your life? To reach out with genuine care and persistence?

Personal Assistant. Every tree in the forest has grown a year older; some have begun to crack. Some people have aged more than a year, mentally and physically. They could really use a gofer, a driver, a checker-inner. Is God calling you to “adopt” an aging person in your life?

We are all on a mission from God. Find and fulfill your calling. It need not take over your entire life, though if it truly comes from God it will make an impact on other lives. As redeemed people of God, we express our thanksgiving to God by answering our callings. Find and fulfill yours.