

Title: The High Cost of Discipleship

Subtitle: Losing your life to gain it.

Video URL: https://youtu.be/dglxLoGe_90

The context of our Gospel today reveals that Jesus has started down the long road that will ultimately lead to Jerusalem and His death. Then, while on the way, Jesus asked the disciples, ***“Who do you say that I am?”***¹ As the disciple’s spokesperson, Peter confesses with a triumphant moment of revelation, ***“You are the Christ.”***² However, the disciples still do not know how Jesus will fulfill his mission. Therefore, Jesus begins ***“to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”***³ On hearing this, Peter objects. From a human point of view, what Jesus said seems like pure folly. Who would ever design a method of saving the world that would include disaster, despair, and death? No one! Yet, what seems like sheer foolishness is precisely what Jesus has in mind. Therefore, he calls the crowd around Him and announces what it means to confess and believe in Him. He says, ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it.”***⁴

This concept is so mind-blowing that it is worth repeating. And the reason Jesus calls the crowd in on what he has to say is that the stringent demand for self-renunciation is relevant for all believers and just for his elite group of twelve disciples.

¹ Mark 8:27

² Mark 8:29 (Matthew 16:16 adds, “Son of the Living God.” Luke 9:20 adds, “Christ of God.”)

³ Mark 8:31

⁴ Mark 8:34-35

Evidently, none of us are meant to be detached observers of his passion but men and women who grow in faith and understanding through our participation in his sufferings. But, like Peter, we struggle with what this means.

This scenario reminds me of a comical skit where Jack Benny was accosted in a dark alleyway by a mugger who stuck a gun in Benny's ribs and said, "Your money or your life!" Benny hardly stirs, so his assailant says again more firmly, "Your money or your life!" And finally, with hands raised in the air, he says, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!"

We always laughed at Jack Benny, but this story comes close to home. Over and over again, we have to decide what is ultimately and fundamentally important to us. If this situation actually happened, Jack would undoubtedly have to lose something to save his life. And whether he liked it or not, a decision would be made. And the same is true for us.

So, let's look again at what is being said about discipleship. As you hear the words, "***For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it,***"⁵ what images come to your mind? Indeed, most of us (including myself) feel conflicted. And some who hear it feel paralyzed and stuck. We are drawn to the life Jesus offers, yet at the same time, we are not sure what we may have to give up or lose.

For example, when we graduated from college, our ambitions were to work in the best situation, live in the best neighborhood, have the best things in the house, and make the best vacation choices. This definition of "finding," "making," or "gaining" one's life would make these sayings to be one and the

⁵ Ibid.

same as the American dream. And we, like Jack Benny, do a lot of “thinking about it.”

I have to admit that I want to:

- Be a success,
- Be comfortable,
- And live in such a way that life is a series of gains, not losses.

But if my desires focus only on my self-centered ambitions, I have missed the point of what a disciple truly is.

Jesus is trying to say that the person who tries to find personal fulfillment while focusing only on themselves will lose it. But alternatively, ***“those who lose their life for my sake and the Gospel will find it.”***⁶

Therefore, if you’ve concentrated your life on making it, building up an estate, gaining as much as you can, and you are still holding onto these things as an ultimate way of life, I’m sure these verses may seem strange indeed. When assumptions about our values, motives, and goals are shaken, our basic emotional and spiritual security is also upset. But this can be a good thing.

Take, for example, the way hunters in South America capture monkeys. They build a cage with a hole just big enough for the monkey’s hand to slip into it. Then, the monkey’s favorite nut is placed inside it. But when the monkey reaches into the cage and takes hold of it, the hole is not big enough for both the nut and his hand that is wrapped around it. To his demise, the monkey will not let go of the nut, even if it costs him his life.

Spiritually speaking, we are not much different. There are things that God may want for you, but if you hold onto them too

⁶ Ibid.

tightly, these blessings can be turned into idols, which distorts our moral vision and ultimately causes us to lose our lives.

Our New Testament lesson speaks about Abraham inheriting the world “...*not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*”⁷ Abraham had it all because he was willing to lose it all. And “*He grew strong in faith as he gave glory to God.*”⁸

This principle is significant because so many people have arranged their lives so that they have to trust God for very little? Life’s abundance doesn’t come to those whose lives are superficially secure and confined to small spaces they have created for themselves.

It’s well known fact that the world’s happier people are not those who are trying to make themselves happy. The happy ones are usually those caught up in a cause that transcends the ordinary flatland of their lives and who, perhaps one day, notice—they’re happy! The cause of causes, Jesus says, is discipleship—living to know, love, and serve God in the power and freedom of the Holy Spirit.

The secret of life is in the paradox of being winning losers. We “find,” “gain,” and “save” a life truly worth living by giving up the false security of having ourselves at the center of our lives and reaching out from a new Christ-centered spiritual dynamic that focuses our energies and courage in a new direction: to save our lives by giving of our time, talents, and treasure to be part of God’s dream of living in obedience to Christ’s commands and finding for ourselves the surprising grace of a truly abundant and fulfilled life. *Amen*

⁷ Romans 4:13

⁸ Romans 4:20