

April 1, 2007

The Two Crosses
Mark 8:31-9:1

The Gospel uncovers the lies we live under and the frailties of our flesh.

Many in the Church live neatly packaged lives – thinking Jesus makes the Faith a simple matter of ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ – but it is more – The way Jesus puts it is that we are to take up our cross and follow Him. You get the sense that He is speaking of something sacrificial and costly – and He is.

A little doctrine:

When God created Adam and Eve He gave them everything. He gave them the Garden of Eden, and the fruit of the land. He gave them one another – and He gave them Himself. In a nutshell, He gave them life – life in all its fullness. There was no sin, no death and no misery.

But then they ate the forbidden fruit, and when they did, everything changed – They were sentenced to die at every level – physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally and socially – and they **began** to die and eventually they **did** die – all humanity, in fact. We live on the earth, but we don’t live the way we were created to live. We are living out our deaths.

And the problem is that in this life, everything we hold on to, that is, everything we put our hopes and dreams into – is dying just as we are, or we would be satisfied.

So what this means is that as good as it gets in any one moment, life exists in the reality that all things are passing away.

But for a brief moment in history everything seemed to be turned around. Jesus came, and He brought healing and power and hope and love. He announced the Kingdom of God. It seemed He had brought heaven to earth.

But then Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to die – and for the disciples, this translated to mean that this magnificent experience of friendship and fellowship they had enjoyed with Jesus was going to come to an end.

Jesus challenges you to take up your cross and follow Him – and in doing so He calls you to two things:

First, He calls you to die to yourself – What He means is that belonging to Him involves relinquishing your right to control your life.

2 Corinthians 5:15 – “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

“True freedom is being liberated from our misplaced dependencies for life, love, worth, significance, peace and fulfillment. I’ve discovered my most significant felt needs in life correspond with a deeper need that only God Himself can satisfy.”

Jim Palmer – *Relevant Magazine*

The Gospel teaches that in order to get a life I have to give mine up – Jesus says that in order to live I first have to die – I have to die to myself – I have to give up on the notion that things and relationships and pleasures and knowledge – and all that kind of stuff can truly satisfy.

- It means you can't live to fix your past – you can only trust Christ for healing.
- It means you'll never find meaning in applause – hide in Jesus.
- It means that you can't pin happiness on marriage – you can only look to Christ and offer up your loneliness.
- It means you can't find satisfaction in revenge – give up that bitterness to Christ

In other words, while the entire world lives in the opposite mode, we are called to give that up. Paul calls this being 'crucified with Christ.

Galatians 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.”

Second, He calls you to follow Him

The call of the Gospel is counter-cultural. How you live will be unacceptable to a dying culture that measures things on the surface.

The writer of Hebrews puts it in geographical terms, calling us to go with Jesus 'outside the city gate,' 'outside the camp.' He calls us to walk the path of rejection.

In a dying culture...

- It isn't acceptable to sacrifice power for weakness.
- It isn't acceptable to turn the other cheek
- It isn't acceptable to forgive when you've been wronged
- It is more acceptable to store up than to give away.

But this is the way of the Cross. Deny yourself.

- Deny your right to hold a grudge.
- Deny yourself the freedom to exploit the weaknesses of others
- Deny yourself cheap pleasure... expense of human dignity
- Deny yourself the appearance of spirituality... cost of honesty

And in doing so you have chosen the path of Christ – you understand the Cross. You have begun to live because you have given your life away – to Him.

Jesus says it powerfully – when you lose your life for His sake, you gain it. In other words, whoever gives up the notion that anything or anyone can fill us on earth, that is, when we realize that everything we have and attain and long for on earth is just as much under the Curse as we are – and we follow Jesus, we have begun to live as though we have been restored – because we have been – through Christ.

The ‘religious’ way is to fight this tireless losing battle within you, and to put on airs of righteousness, while dying inside of shame and guilt – because you can’t overcome.

But the Gospel teaches that rather than fight what you can’t conquer, surrender what you can’t really control – Give yourself up by admitting that you are weak and desperate for God’s Grace in Jesus. This is dying to self.

Following Jesus means hanging all our hopes and dreams on Him alone for happiness, fulfillment and peace.

But there is more:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that while Jesus' sacrifice is the only one that atones for sin, our sacrifice is the means by which we display the Gospel and bear the burdens of a broken world:

- When we forgive others we bear the burden of the ungraced
- When we defend the weak we bear the burden of the hopeless
- When we turn the other cheek we bear the burden of hatred
- When we love lavishly we bear the burden of the terrified
- When we give sacrificially we bear the burden of the self-consumed

Jesus says, 'My Cross is for your salvation – but yours is for a world desperate for demonstrations of hope and love – a world that has not yet realized that the only true thing is the Gospel – that there is someone and something worth giving your life to – that when you give your life to me, you will suddenly find it – and this is the beginning of real life.'