

Jesus: Not what we think

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, thank you for coming this morning, and with one hour extra of sleep, you must be really refreshed, really attentive, and ready to receive God's Word brought to you this morning.
- So, I'm going to begin with a question, which I don't often do with you, but I know that you're much more alert now, so I'm ready to at least respond, not outwardly, but inwardly to this question.
- And that is, what is the worst loss, maybe in the past year, that you've incurred? Was it your keys, or maybe your savings?
- Maybe a job, or a parent? Or what about your health, or your hearing, or maybe even your vision?
- Or, Lord have mercy, a child. Losses are moments in our life that make us vividly vulnerable, and spiritually, they can work in one of two ways.
- [1 : 0 5] They can either drive us away from the Lord, or to the Lord. Losses are searching events in our life, but we need losses to show us what we truly value, and the Lord loses no opportunity to use our loss for His purposes and glory.
- Today's reading is about exposing what we value through loss for the sake of mission. And loss is a time that resets what we give ultimate significance to. If you want to know what you or someone else values, just take it away.
- If you or another holds on to something loosely, then you're likely to get little reaction. On the other hand, if you or another holds on to something really tightly, then you're likely to get a great reaction.
- Reactions of anger, or guilt, or sadness, or maybe reactions of fight, or flight, or just freezing. Jesus invites His disciples and us today about this subject of loss for the sake of mission.
- And this loss exposes what we value and invites us to radical discipleship. Our Lord does this by raising a question about what we think, what we do, and actually what motivates us.
- [2 : 2 0] And He challenges us in three ways. He challenges the way that we think. He tells us to take up our cross. And He says, then we'll receive our reward.
- So let's look at these three things. First, Jesus challenges us to take, sorry, to change the way we think. Jesus begins with this really big challenge.
- He says, as things have been unfolding here, as if the challenge wasn't already big enough, our Lord has told His 12 men the negative reaction that they are going to receive when they bring this message, actually, of good news.
- And Jesus is anticipating His disciples' or apostles' anxiety. He addresses their anxiety about the adversity and opposition, actually, through their minds or their perceptions of what's going on.
- And He says this, right from the beginning. You heard it. You know it. I know. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

[3 : 26] Now, that probably doesn't sound strange to you because you're so familiar with it. But imagine how that might have sounded to His disciples. He's just told His disciples earlier on in this section this, In other words, ask for peace, but don't expect it.

Jesus is now telling His disciples, You think peace and not sword, but I think sword and not peace. Jesus is jogging His disciples' memory here.

He's not just thinking up this idea on the spot. Where is this actually coming from? Maybe you know. I didn't know this week, so I actually went looking because it sounded so strange when I slowed down to reread it.

But in Jeremiah chapter 4, verse 10, there's this kind of exchange between God and Jeremiah. Why don't you actually turn there with me? Pick up your Bible. You don't have it on your lap.

Turn with me to page 630. Actually, it's 631. And we'll go to verse 9, but read 9 and 10 together. Are you there?

[4 : 48] Actually, let's do this. Let's read it together, out loud. You're good at that. Together. In that day, declares the Lord, courage shall fail both kings and officials.

The priests shall be appalled and the prophets astounded. Then I said, Ah, Lord God, surely you have utterly deceived this people in Jerusalem, saying, It shall be well with you, whereas the sword has reached their very life.

Let me give you another translation of this using the same words, expressing the same thing. Then I, Jeremiah, said, Lord God, you have tricked the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

You said you will have peace. But now the sword is pointing at your throats. Peace and a sword.

Jesus is fulfilling the Lord's word in the mouth of Jeremiah. Remember, our Lord is slow to anger and bounding and steadfast love. We might think this as strange as Jeremiah and the disciples and the apostles.

[5 : 54] They are thinking one thing, and Jesus is actually thinking something else. The Son of Man hasn't come to bring peace to the world. He's come to bring judgment, represented by the sword, and not peace on earth, not a war either, but not the kind of peace that they're thinking about.

And this requires thinking the way that Jesus thinks. Jesus has come to bring judgment upon God's people, and it will divide and separate families, parents, children, in-laws.

That's what Jesus says. And they will think and act differently about Jesus and then toward one another. This is just reality.

Jesus didn't come to play a Jewish family therapist. But he came to bring mercy through his judgment. And that changes the way we think.

That's his first challenge. He changes the way we think with respect to mission. But he also says this, take up your cross. So Jesus continues with this similar theme in the next four verses, continuing with family relationship.

[7 : 02] He presses the matter of value or worth. In other words, if Jesus has come to set family members against one another, or the consequence when he brings this message of judgment and mercy, sets members against one another, then something must be of more value than fathers, children, and in-laws.

Not that fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters aren't of value. He's saying just if you love them more than you love me, it will expose your value. So by comparison, Jesus is of different worth.

He's not just better than them. He's unique. He says we're not worthy of him if those closest to us share the same value as Jesus.

Jesus is altogether in a different category. He's of unique value. Moreover, not even our own life equals the life of Jesus.

Jesus' life is of ultimate significance. Value. Worth. How much value is Jesus' life to us? Well, here's the measure for Jesus.

[8 : 14] He says this, And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. So not only does radical decisionship change the way we think, but what we do.

Jesus introduces something new and seemingly absurd. What's new here? Let's slow down a little bit and think about what Jesus has said up to this point.

The new thing that he inserts here that he hasn't at all before is the cross. It's easy to have forgotten that. It was strange enough that Jesus said, Think sword, not peace.

But now he's calling his disciples, apostles, us, to cross. Death. Death. You've heard of cross training and cross fitness.

This discipleship is called cross dying. And this is the first time that Jesus has introduced the cross. Hasn't said anything about it up to this point.

[9 : 15] Hasn't even talked about his death yet. He hasn't even made the connection of his death with the cross, on the cross.

And you might have thought he'd call his disciples and apostles to taking up their cross after he revealed his death would come on a cross. But he doesn't.

That will come later in chapters 16, 20, and 23 when he talks about his death first in 16. And then he connects it in 20 and 23 with the cross.

But for now he's calling forth surrender to him based on what he's revealed about himself. And Jesus acts the same of us. Though we know about his death on the cross.

He asks us as he did them to take up our cross. Not as a means of salvation by works. So that we will see the value of his life.

[10 : 13] That is salvation through him. As he places the value on our life with the value of his life. So that's the second thing. Take up your cross.

And then finally receive your reward. Jesus is cutting to the point in these last three verses. Like never before with his disciples, apostles, us. Through these searching questions.

What do you think? What will you do? What motivates you? Most of us are motivated by one thing or another. Since Jesus has been preparing his disciples, his apostles, for mission.

That's what he's doing here. He prepares them for what looks like a lot of rejection. If not worse. It sounds like a lot of failure. A lot of death.

And in that case, why on earth would anyone want to join with his mission? But it's not all about what happens on earth. Jesus raises this matter of rewards.

[11 : 15] By way of example, he raises the rewards of prophets, righteous ones, and those who actually give water to children. The path of prophets, righteous ones, and these other servants.

This kind of child likeness by giving water to children is really hard. And in all these cases, the road is long.

And the distance is timely and takes a lot of time. It's mostly like marathon running. It's not a sprint. And in the midst of this, Jesus promises a reward.

Notice, though, he doesn't say much about the reward. Let's just read it again. Look down with me to verse 40.

It says, Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet, will receive a prophet's reward.

[12 : 17] Okay? And the one who receives a righteous person, because he is a righteous person, will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water, because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Notice there's not much mention about what the reward in particular is. But Jesus promises a reward. Well, who really thinks well of these three people that Jesus has described?

And I think herein lies some clue to our reward. In the end, the reward is about the world thinking well of another. And the other is not us, but it's Jesus.

And others think well of Jesus. That is the disciples and the apostles and our reward. Others thinking really well of who Jesus is and seeing who he is.

I'll share this in closing. 31 years ago, a long time, I attended a conference, a convention. It was called Urbana 87. You may have heard of these gatherings by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship once every three years.

[13 : 40] They gather all these students and people that are kind of post-graduate. There were some great speakers there. G. Fernando was the expositor of scripture, but there was this little medical missionary woman by the name of Helen Rosevear that was there.

I'll never forget Helen Rosevear. And she made great sacrifice to serve, not according to the theme that year, which was urban mission, because she wasn't in an urban center.

But I'll never forget her message. She raised this question of our motivation for mission. This what we think and what we do and why we do it, how important it is.

And she said this about our motivation. She said that it's not, we're not motivated by the condition of those who we go to serve or to reach. Nor are we motivated by the compassion of those who go, ourselves.

It's not about our compassion. This is the other thing that was quite shocking, which I'm not sure I actually agreed with her about. But she said it's not even the content of the gospel that motivates us.

[14 : 48] I think that's really, really important. But she said this, which takes us right back to the beginning of what Jesus says. And that is that the motivation for mission is the mind of Christ.

When we know what it is that Jesus actually thinks and how he actually sees the people, and we're united with our Lord, then we have the motivation of Christ.

And therein then follows what we do, because we think the way our Lord thinks. And we behold the mind of Christ. Friends, as we continue to worship today, we pray for God's spirit and his grace that he fills us so much, that we have his mind on the world in which we live, and we count the cost and take up our cross, and keep thinking the way Jesus does.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.