

Sacrifice of the Will

Matt. 4:19; 10:34-40

Introduction

Last week:

We learned that discipleship of Jesus is relational. It's about learning, following and becoming like Jesus. It's not about adopting religious practices, taught by men. It's not about learning rabbinical teaching of the Law. It's not about following someone's preaching about selected doctrines.

Discipleship is about a specific and growing relationship with Jesus – He is the teacher and we are his disciples; He is the Lord or master and we are His slaves.

We learned 3 things from Jesus' call to discipleship:

1. To love Jesus more than all others.
2. To live selflessly.
3. Obey Jesus' teaching personally.

The Proposition this week:

Peter is a great example of learning to follow Jesus practically, despite the challenge of self-sacrifice ... It takes time ... It's a process ... a journey

Peter's Story

1. Simon, called Peter, came from a fishing family in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. They shared some sort of business relationship with Zebedee and his sons, James and John.
2. Andrew, his brother was the one who had become a follower of John the Baptist and who became a disciple of Jesus. He also brought Peter to meet Jesus. Then Peter became a disciple and left everything to follow Jesus.
3. Peter learned many things from Jesus and they were not easy lessons to apply in his life, but Peter was very open and outspoken in it all and so we can learn a lot from him about how to follow Jesus. Remember that Mark compiled his Gospel from Peter's preaching.
4. A lot took place as Jesus travelled across the Land – Galilee, Judea, Gadara, across the Jordan and the Decapolis etc. Peter followed Jesus through the cities, towns, and villages. He heard Him preach and saw all the miracles. Jesus concluded his teaching with some final words about discipleship.

The Challenge to Sacrifice Self

Matt. 16:21,24,34-40

Jesus' Unique Challenge

It was not uncommon for rabbi's to call for a commitment from their disciples, but Jesus made much higher demands of His disciples than any of His contemporaries. Using the analogy of a Roman cross, Jesus gave three extremely challenging instructions. To be His disciple, we must become like Him in regard to our willingness to sacrifice.

1. Three Challenging Instructions (Matt. 16:21,24)

1.1 Deny ourselves

This is not to say no to things, but to say an emphatic "No!" to our interests, ambitions and will. It refers to giving up what we want; turning away from selfishness and our own concerns.

1.2 Take up our cross

The instruction is a very intense one. Jesus was calling for an immediate response: "take up or lift your cross at once!" This is not some burden or hardship to bear. This means to follow Jesus and identify with Him in His rejection, suffering and death.

1.3 Follow Him

This involves the choice: either the world or Jesus. Jesus meant that the disciples should follow Him on the road or journey that He was undertaking.

The question is how are we to do this? What did Jesus mean by His instruction? Let us look at His example for the answers.

2. Jesus' Example of Personal Sacrifice (Matt. 10:34-42)

2.1 Jesus' own Experience

- a) Family - His family rejected Him and did not believe in Him or in His mission.¹ Instead Jesus embraced a new family of believers (Matt. 12:46-50)
- b) Finances - Jesus surrendered personal wealth (Matt. 8:20)

2.2 His challenge to His disciples

- a) Family - Matt. 19:23-30
- b) Finances – Matt. 4:20,22

Jesus gave Three Reasons (Matt. 16:25-27)

In these next few verses Jesus gives us three good reasons to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him:

1. Save or lose (Matt. 16:25)

We may save our life (physical or psychological) but it will cost us eternal life. Conversely, we may lose our life but gain eternal life. This saying of Jesus is found in all the Gospels – no other saying received such emphasis.²

2. Gain or lose (Matt. 16:26)

This verse is essentially the same except that the contrast is between the world and our soul or life, which is our true self. It is frightening to realize that there is an exchange here³ – a gain and a loss. The trade-off is subtle when we go after the world's things; we lose your true self. The world is passing away and eternity lays ahead – why would anyone surrender what he can't lose to gain something he can't keep? It's like Esau trading his birth right for a pot of lentil soup!

3. Choose the eternal over the temporal (Matt. 16:27)

Jesus is coming again, and His reward is with Him. We should invest in the Kingdom of God in order to gain an eternal reward for this life. It is a simple equation – by yielding ourselves, our resources and our energies in the Kingdom of God now, there will be an eternal and unfading reward in the age to come.

Conclusion

The Key Issue

Self-sacrifice deals with the will – it involves a decision. It involves three instructions:

1. **Deny yourself**
Practice self-sacrifice and say “No!” to your interests, ambitions and will.
2. **Take up your cross**
Make up your mind right now – identify with Jesus in His experience.
3. **Follow Jesus**
Choose between the world's agenda and Christ's will for your life.

Application

Are you willing to:

- Suffer the painful separation from loved ones in order to advance the Kingdom of Heaven e.g. live far away from them.
- Pay the price of living according to God's agenda, rather than the world's agenda e.g. deny rather than chase selfish ambitions that consume everything else.
- Invest for eternity today by living fully for the Lord

¹ Matt. 13:53-58; Mark 3:21; John 7:3-5

² Matt. 10:38-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:24; 14:26-27; 17:33; John 12:25

³ The Greek word is *antallagma*, which refers to something given in barter for another.

Remember that Jesus was teaching on discipleship, and not on sonship. We become children of God by faith in Jesus alone, and not by sacrifice. But it will cost us something to be a disciple of Jesus