



Lesson 6 | Sacrificial Service

Bible Text: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸ And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Commentary

In Lesson One we learned that the gospel has both an objective and subjective dimension.

Objectively, it describes both the person of Christ (who he is) and the work of Christ (what he has done). Subjectively, it describes our faith response to this objective truth (*i.e.*, believing the gospel). In today's text we see this very same gospel dynamic.

Jesus began by asking the question of his identity, "Who do people say that I am?" (v. 27b). After three wrong answers from his disciples, Peter pronounced the answer of the ages: "You are the Christ" (meaning "Messiah," "Anointed One"; v. 29b). However, Jesus knew that in God's timing for the unfolding of his plan of redemption, it was premature to announce his identity publicly, so he forbid his disciples to share this truth (v. 30).

Jesus then expanded the conversation to include

*And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."*

a discussion of his impending work. This would involve his suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection (v. 31). Peter, who correctly answered the question regarding the person of Christ, failed miserably in understanding the work of Christ. He then proceeded to *[take] him [Christ] aside and began to rebuke him* (v. 32b). Why did Peter offer such a rebuke?

First, in principle, we see from Scripture that there are two radically, diametrically opposed viewpoints about life and death. The first is man-centered (anthropocentric), and the second is God-centered (theocentric). Isaiah makes this vast disparity very clear:

“... my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Once again, we should be spiritually suspicious of our natural responses to threatening circumstances. Not only does the gospel teach us to “write with the opposite hand,” but it also teaches us to “think with the opposite brain.” That is, we must ask the Lord to help us see things from his perspective (supernaturally) rather than from our fallen impulses (naturally). Jesus said to Peter, *“For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man”* (v. 33b). Let us call this natural anthropocentrism.

Secondly, Peter responded to Christ from a cultural (not biblical) Jewish perspective. The Jews at that time believed that when Messiah came, he would do so with great military power and oust those who were oppressing God’s people. They misinterpreted the Old Testament’s teaching about the coming Messiah, making him a conquering king rather than a suffering servant. The Lord’s description of his own suffering and death (i.e., defeat) was impossible to reconcile with this Jewish idea of triumphalism. Let us call this Scripture distortion.

Thirdly, and very importantly, Peter was (as we are) a child of Adam and Eve. His nature was radically committed to strategies of self-protection. After being expelled from a perfectly safe and secure Garden of Eden, our first parents entered a world that was very unsafe and insecure. In the Garden there was no danger and they needed no protection. In the world there is constant danger (physically, relationally, spiritually, emotionally, etc.), and we, by nature, are radically committed to devising self-made strategies for protection (physically, relationally, spiritually, emotionally, etc.). Let us call this our addiction to self-protection.

We see Peter’s (and our own) addiction to self-protection in Mark 14:66-72. Three times Peter

was asked about his relationship with Jesus, and three times he denied even knowing Christ. Is not the fear of rejection (or persecution) one of the greatest reasons, if not the greatest reason, that Christians are not more vocal about their faith in a hostile and unbelieving world?

To have an aversion to suffering and to seek to protect ourselves from danger is not inherently sinful. If a poisonous snake appeared in a path we were walking, our natural and wise course of action would be to avoid it. The Lord often protects us from danger through this natural impulse. But in our sinfulness we have idolized self-protection and are slaves to it.

Gospel Living Requires Gospel Suffering

But the essence of this passage is the introduction of the radical notion that gospel living involves inevitable suffering. The very thing that we spend our lives avoiding is the very thing that Jesus has us engaging:

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8)

Not only is Peter rebuked for his desire to see Christ avoid suffering, but we are all rebuked for our impulse to avoid suffering and for not denying ourselves and taking up our cross to follow Christ. Gospel-living requires gospel-suffering. Sacrifice is inherent in sanctification. Bearing the cross precedes wearing the crown.

**Gospel-living requires
gospel-suffering**

The Silence of the Church

In a culture that continually and effectively marginalizes the evangelical church, Christians have grown increasingly silent. Are we “*ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation*” (Mark 8:38)? In my own Christian lifetime of some 42 years, I have observed a sobering trend in our culture that might be generally referred to as three phases of the church’s decline.

In Phase One, when I was a child of the 1950s and part of the “baby-boomer” generation, Christianity was culturally acceptable, even expected. Church attendance was part of the normal pattern of life, prayer and the reading of the Ten Commandments were part of our public education, and certain vices were clearly forbidden (and, therefore, done in secret).

In Phase Two, a period hard to date but somewhere from the 1960s to near the end of the last century, Christianity in America was increasingly seen as either irrelevant or simply as one of many religious choices. Pluralism and ethical relativism had won the day, and evangelicals sought to distance themselves, often inappropriately, from these dual enemies of the gospel.

“...godly Christians are now, in the eyes of many, a danger that must be faced and a problem that must be solved.”

In Phase Three, generally evidenced from the turn of the century to the present, biblical Christianity is now often perceived as a threat to the American way of life. Judged as “right wing,” “extremist,” and “judgmental,” godly Christians are now, in the eyes of many, a danger that must be faced and a problem that must be solved. To use Pauline language from Romans 1, our

contemporary culture is well described:

18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. . . . 21For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . . 24Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves . . . 26For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions . . . 27and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:18-32, selected verses)

Is this not an accurate description of our current, tragic state of affairs? What is most significant is that the depraved are called *haters of God*. According to Jesus, if such men hate God they will also hate us who profess to know and follow him (John 15:20).

In short, given the day in which we live, we must be prepared to suffer for our faith in ways previously unseen in our country, and we must teach and prepare our children to suffer for their faith as well. This is why our Lord’s call is so critical in our time: “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34).

The Perfect Storm and Consumer “Churchianity”

When all three of these powerful forces are combined (natural anthropocentrism, Scripture distortion, and addiction to self-protection), a “perfect storm” results that attempts to sink the battleship of gospel living and replace it with the cruise liner of “consumer churchianity.” We see this storm’s tragic damage in our hearts and in many of our churches.

Pulpiters who winsomely proclaim and practically model an easy believism that not only avoids suffering but also promises prosperity may have full churches, but they have as well an empty gospel. This makes for well-fed consumers but gospel-starved practitioners.

Jesus taught that, just as it is not possible to remove the cross from his life (vv. 31-33), neither is it removable from ours:

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul?” (Mark 8)

The difference between the two crosses is this: His was redemptive in nature, purchasing for us our salvation; ours is responsive in nature, as we follow the will of our Redeemer wherever and however he leads us. Following Jesus in sacrificial service is both a call and a privilege. What does such sacrificial service look like, and what does it cost us? Examples include, but of course are not limited to, the following:

- Tithing: If we believe that the tithe belongs to the Lord and if we acknowledge that the tithe is ten percent of our income, then for many, honoring the tithe would be a form of sacrificial service. One piece of the family budget pie would need to get smaller so that the “giving to the Lord’s work” piece of the pie could get larger.

- Witnessing: If we share our faith with those who do not know Christ, there is always the possibility that we will be maligned or persecuted. This is a form of sacrificial service.
- Time: If we possess a consumer mentality (or, more accurately, it possesses us), we might attend a church of our choice but not be willing to participate in its ministry. We most likely would have to sacrifice a portion of our hectic schedules (including entertainments) in order to serve the Lord and his church.
- Vocation: If we work for an employer who requires us to violate the will of God in order to perform our job (lying, writing false reports, manipulating others, etc.), then we may well suffer dismissal rather than compromise our integrity. This is a form of sacrificial service.
- Peer relationships: If our friends engage in immoral conduct and expect or invite us to do the same, we may well suffer their scorn for not doing so. This is a form of sacrificial service.
- Persecution: We might suffer the loss of a job (or worse) by those who persecute us.

Examples abound, but the principle is plain: Jesus made it exceedingly clear that gospel living requires suffering. We do not wear suffering on our sleeve as a merit badge of our courage. We bear suffering in our hearts and lives because the One who suffered on our behalf calls us to join him in suffering for our good and his glory.

The difference between the two crosses is this: His was redemptive in nature, purchasing for us our salvation; ours is responsive in nature,

Questions for Discussion & Reflection

1. Discuss Peter’s response to our Lord and our Lord’s response to Peter. Share any new insight you might have gained from your study.
2. What does it mean “to write with the opposite hand”? What does it mean to “think with the opposite brain”? Refer to Romans 12:1-2 in this regard.
3. What is the “perfect storm” in this lesson? How has that storm impacted you personally? as a family? as a congregation?
4. PARENTS: How have you personally been impacted by this perfect storm, and what example have you set for your children in responding to it? How are you teaching your children to resist such a storm in their lives?
5. TEENS: Give some examples from your own experience of your struggle against this perfect storm. How will you overcome these forces in your heart, your school, and your friendships?
6. CHURCH MEMBERS: When is the last time you heard a sermon on suffering as an aspect of God’s will in your life? How does God use suffering for our good and the good of others? Identify one area of your life in which your self-protective strategies have sinfully resisted the will of God (relationships, finances, witnessing, etc.).
7. CHURCH LEADERS: Do you believe that God calls us to “do the right thing and trust him for the results”? Might this result in our suffering as leaders? How have we responded in the past to the perfect storm? How is God leading us to be different in this regard? What will be the outcome when we radically and sacrificially follow the Lord’s leading?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: Write below a personal prayer of confession for anything about which the Lord has convicted you, and then preach the gospel to yourself in joyful forgiveness.



Suggested Prayer

(from *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of prayers, used by permission, Banner of Truth Trust, "Living for Jesus," p. 58)

O SAVIOUR OF SINNERS,

Thy name is excellent,
thy glory high,
thy compassions unfailing,
thy condescension wonderful,
thy mercy tender.

I bless thee for the discoveries, invitations, promises of the gospel,
for in them is pardon for rebels,
liberty for captives,
health for the sick,
salvation for the lost.

I come to thee in thy beloved name of Jesus;
re-impress thy image upon my soul;

Raise me above the smiles and frowns of the world,
regarding it as a light thing to be judged by men;

May thy approbation be my only aim,
thy Word my one rule.

Make me to abhor that which grieves thy Holy Spirit,
to suspect consolations of a worldly nature,
to shun a careless way of life,
to reprove evil,
to instruct with meekness those who oppose me,
to be gentle and patient towards all men,
to be not only a professor but an example of the gospel,
displaying in every relation, office, and condition
its excellency, loveliness and advantages.

How little have I illustrated my principles and improved by privileges!

How seldom have I served my generation!

How often have I injured and not recommended my redeemer!

How few are those blessed through me!

In many things I have offended,
in all come short of thy glory;

Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.