

6-25-23

Sermon– Casual Convenient and Comfortable

Scripture: Mark 8:31-38 CTW- PS 86: 1-10

Hymns: 540, 455, 533

Theme: There is nothing casual, convenient, or comfortable about true discipleship. There is a denial you must embrace. How in the world do we do that? Jesus is telling us that we can no longer be the center of our lives. Remember what Paul said, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price."

Intro: I saw a cartoon that showed a church building with a billboard in front that said: "The LITE CHURCH: 24% fewer commitments, home of the 5% tithe, 10 minute sermons, 45 minute services; we have only 8 commandments–your choice–it's everything you've wanted in a church and less."

Far too many people have that kind of relationship with the Lord.
Let me give you 3 words which define many people's relationship with God: Casual, Convenient, & Comfortable.

The word **casual** means occasional.....coming at certain times, w/o regularity; showing little interest or concern; nonchalant; not close or intimate.

Convenient is being suitable to one's comfort, purposes, or needs. The faith of many is driven by convenience, and it fails when it is challenged to true discipleship.

Comfortable is that we want to meet in air-conditioned building in the summer, & a heated building in the winter, & we want to hear sermons that make us feel good, & God forbid if we should ever be made to feel uncomfortable or asked to do something that we're not comfortable with doing.

There is nothing casual, convenient, or comfortable about true discipleship. In the original Greek it says "Keep on denying yourself, keep on taking up your cross, & keep on following me." THIS IS NOT THE DECISION OF A MOMENT, BUT THE DIRECTION FOR A LIFETIME!

This isn't very appealing is it? Imagine the recruiting poster-
"Come suffer with us!"

Jesus gives us the motive which will move us in this direction:
"For whoever would save his life will lose it; & whoever loses his life for my sake & the gospel's will save it."

I. There is a DENIAL You Must EMBRACE. HOW IN THE WORLD DO WE DO THAT?

A. Self-denial is the bedrock of discipleship.

When Jesus speaks of self-denial, He is not merely speaking of denying some pleasure or comforts in life like so many do during Lent. It goes much deeper than that.

Jesus is telling us that we can no longer be the center of our lives.

He is never concerned about what we do so much as with what we are. He is not talking about giving up luxuries, or even necessities, but about denying self, which is entirely different.

Denying self means that we renounce our right to ourselves; our right to run our own lives. We are to deny that we own ourselves. We do not have the final right to decide what we are going to do, or where we are going to go.

For years I ran my Christian life by telling God that I was in charge and I would call Him if and when I needed Him. We all know how that turned out...I would not recommend it!

When it is stated in those terms it sounds outrageous. It strikes

right at the heart of our very existence. The one thing that we value, covet, & protect above anything else is the right to make decisions for ourselves.

We refuse to be under anything or anybody but reserve the right to make the final decisions of our lives. ***Remember what Paul said, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price."** 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a. If you are going to follow Jesus, you no longer own yourself.

B. Self-denial is to follow Christ no matter what cost is involved. Martin Luther said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, & suffers nothing, is worth nothing." Please take a moment to remember that!

ILL- A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say "Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait." Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Okay Ryan, you be Jesus!"

That's the problem isn't it? We want everyone else to deny themselves but want to forget that Christ is calling us to a life of self-denial.

Self-denial is not easy. We all have things we want. We all have goals, but Christ is clear that when we choose to follow Him, we must deny ourselves.

That means you can't always do what you want to do; what your natural tendency is. This means that you will face tough, life-changing decisions that need to be made in the shadow of the cross, & not the desires of the heart.

This doesn't mean that you'll be deprived of joy and happiness; rather it means that you find fulfillment & joy & happiness

through dedication to Jesus Christ. ***Denial of self is placing yourself in the hands of God at all times, no matter where His hands might lead you.**

II. There is a DEATH You Must EXPERIENCE.

When Jesus said, "Take up your cross" the cross wasn't a beloved symbol like it is today. It was big & ugly--a heavy, crude device of torture that conveyed a message of shame, suffering, & death.

But what does it mean to bear a cross? Let's first consider what bearing your cross is not. When facing difficult circumstance, people often say, "I guess that's a cross I have to bear,"

When people speak about bearing a cross in this manner, they're speaking about circumstances & situations that, given the choice, they wouldn't choose it. I don't say this to make light of the unfortunate and tragic situations we find ourselves in, but it's just not bearing a cross.

When we suffer from sickness, disease, & discouragement, bad neighbors, or horrible in-laws it's a horrible misfortune, but it's not bearing a cross.

A. Bearing the cross is a choice. It is a voluntary form of sacrificial obedience that identifies us completely w/Jesus.

Bearing our cross is something we deliberately take up and bear. We don't usually like that, for many rather wear a cross than bear a cross. Bearing a cross is the culmination of who we are—who we have become because we have chosen to believe.

Committed followers are cross-bearers; casual followers seek an easier way.

Committed followers dare to discipline themselves; casual followers are looking for spiritual growth shortcuts.

Committed followers seek holiness; casual followers seek happiness.

Committed followers seek to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; casual followers seek an emotional lift.

Committed followers seek to please God in all they do; casual followers live as close to the edge as they can.

Committed followers seek to make it to heaven; casual followers seek to merely escape hell.

B. Committed followers say, "What ministry can I find to help in the church?" Casual followers say, "What's in it for me?"

III. There is a DIRECTION You Must get started on. Jesus said "follow me."

Ghandi was once asked by a friend, "If you admire Christ so much, why don't you become a Christian?" He replied, "When I meet a Christian who is a follower of Christ, I may consider it."

A. Many have become quite happy to call themselves Christians w/little or no thought of really following Christ. As followers we are to replicate His love, grace, mercy, compassion, truth, & purity. For followers it is a relationship, an adventure, a passionate pursuit of Christ.

We were created to follow. Christ calls us to follow Him. Not some creed; ritual; or custom; but follow Him wherever He leads us.

B. Following Christ is a relationship that drives & defines all we are to do. It would be dull & boring if it were nothing but rules to keep & duties to maintain. Like marriage, we don't find joy in the institution of marriage. We find joy in the living of it!

If your Christianity is dull & boring, if it's a burden & not a blessing, then most likely you're involved in a project, not a Person; a system, not a Savior; rules, rather than a relationship.

IV. Conclusion: Denial, death, & direction aren't exactly words that motivate us are they?

In closing I want to answer a question you may be asking. **Why?** Why should I do all of this? Denial, death, and direction aren't exactly words that motivate us are they?

A. I'll answer your question in one brief statement: Because He did it for you.

Jesus denied His own rights; He died an agonizing death on the Cross; & the direction He followed was His Father's will. Jesus is the model for our self-denial. He is the image of cross-bearing.

Seeing this was the turning point in the life of Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravians, an early Protestant denomination. They were the first large scale Protestant missionary movement sending missionaries to the slaves in New Land, which is now the United States.

He visited an art museum in Europe where he saw a painting titled "Behold the Man". He was mesmerized by the portrait.

He recognized the love of Christ that had been painted into the face of the Master. He saw the pierced hands, the bleeding head from the crown of thorns, & the wounded side. Underneath the painting was this inscription: "This have I done for you - Now what will you do for me?"

Zinzendorf left that chapel a changed man.

B. That is what moves a person to follow after Jesus in the path of denial. It is what moves one to be a Christian in the first place— not the promise of rewards (though there are rewards) or an escape from hell (though following Christ does mean deliverance from hell).

We are moved by the love of Jesus, for which He endured the cross. People who are really and truly won by that love will never cease following after Jesus. Amen and Amen, Let Us Pray.