

SERMON – PASTOR GREG
25.02.2024

THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

Mark 8:34-38: *Then (Jesus) called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his father's glory.*

In our modern world much of the church has succumbed to the world. So much of the church have reduced the gospel message to be LOVE AND ACCEPT EACH OTHER AS THEY ARE: 'The message of the NT is universal love'. In one sense it is no surprise because modern Western Christianity has increasingly focussed on the truth that God is love but they have done so at the expense of not teaching His holiness. Modern western Christianity has also changed the Biblical meaning of love to say that love means to accept all things and all people and that to reject anything or anyone is wrong.

This is not the Biblical understanding of love which is found clearly in 1 Cor 13: *Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. Love not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

The notion of 'universal love' is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of the NT and of the OT is the very same: God created us in His image to be in a right and proper relationship with Him but we like all human beings have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and so our future is eternal death and eternal separation from God and His love, light and life. But because God so loved the world He sent His One and Only Son to pay the price- to die on the Cross- to redeem us- to save us and this gift of God's grace of eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel. Once for all.

Ephesians 2 highlights this wonderful message in particular verses 8, 9 and 10: *For it is by grace you have been saved through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works so that no one can boast, For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.*

And what are these 'good works which God prepared in advance for us to do?' To follow Jesus, to be his disciple, to be known as a Christian by our words and actions.

Jesus had done many miraculous healings, he had fed thousands with little, he had taught as one with authority and so many came to listen to him and even to follow him.

Then one day he said to them: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters- yes even his own life he cannot be my disciple. And if anyone does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciples...In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

What strange words! What shocking words! What such unloving words! We have come to know Jesus as love personified, as one who came not to be served but to serve and to give us life as a ransom for many. He honoured his own parents and he commanded others to do likewise including the command to honour one's parents. So how can He say that we are called to hate our parents, our siblings, our children even our very own lives? What does he mean?

Think back to the First Commandment: *I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*

Remember also Luther's explanation of a god: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need.

It can also be said that anything we place in importance before the LORD God Almighty is our god and that can include our very own family. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to have Him as number one in our lives- every day and everywhere. Again we might ask the question how do we do this? An easy answer is one that says in the morning before you get out of bed give thanks to your Father in heaven for the night that has been and ask Him to be with you each day. And when you go to bed at night again give thanks to your Father and ask Him to bless you during the night. A simple thing but a profound thing that will bring great blessings to you.

Of course Jesus does not want us to hate our parents, siblings or children- in the letter to the Ephesians we are told: *Wives submit to your husbands...Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church...children honour your parents...Fathers do not exasperate your children* but we are called to have those we love most dearly after the One who created us and who redeemed us- God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And we are called to carry our cross. And we are called to be prepared to give all that we have in order to follow Jesus.

As I wrote these words and as I speak these words a thought comes to mind: Who then can be saved! It is impossible to do this all the time! I love Alicia and the children too much! What is that you want me to give up God? I don't know how and I don't know what it is you want me to give up! And sometimes I say- I simply cannot do it!

But then more words of Jesus come to me: *What is impossible with men is possible with God (Luke 18:27)*. So we do not give up, we continue to do our very best to follow Jesus. Amen.