

Journey to the Cross: A Sacred “Must”

Text: Luke 9:51-62

4-2-17



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“What must you do? How is the sense of ‘must’ both constraining you and liberating you? To what are you able to say ‘no’ without guilt, and ‘yes’ with undistracted passion?”

“How do you think settling the ‘Who am I’ question might help resolve the, ‘What should I do’ question?”

“Have you noticed that even when things are so evidently unmanageable, we still hold onto the illusion of control?”

“Why do you think it’s easier to be associated with all that’s wrong with you than your belovedness? Why do you think God spent less time trying to defend and prove himself and more time trying to convince you that you were loveable?”

“What one decision could you make this week that would help to create some distance between your sin and the person you are becoming? A way to demonstrate, ‘I’m not that person, anymore!’”

Teaching Notes...

I stand before this passion narrative much like I stand before childbirth: I could probably offer you a fair, biological explanation as to how it occurs, but I watched the process unfold before my eyes, my explanations failed to capture the “glory” of the event itself. It was sacred. It was mysterious. It was “more than”.

Over the next few weeks, I offer my reflections on this season with the humility and confidence that such an epic Story demands.

Few, if any, really stuck with Jesus because of their deep conviction about who he really was or what he was doing. Some followed out of desperation. They had no illusions about the dysfunctionality of their lives and their inability to alter it, on their own. Some suspected that Jesus’ way of life was better than any other representation they had seen, so it was worth seeing how this thing would play itself out. Some devoted themselves out of a deep sense of gratitude for having been loved so lavishly.

The beauty of Jesus’ approach was that even if your motives weren’t totally pure, he would not hastily dismiss you. Jesus also realized that the level of commitment engendered in Galilee would not sustain you to Jerusalem.

Before Jesus has ever gone viral, called his first disciple, healed anyone or done anything noteworthy, the voice of the Father is heard declaring his approval... *"This is my son, whom I love. I am pleased with him"*. It is in the 'wilderness' that this identity is put to the test.

In the wilderness, we hear 'voices'. *"If you are..."*

That is not simply an indictment on your performance, but a challenge to your worth/value. Immediately, we hear what we **"are not"** (e.g. mother, spouse, minister, etc.)

Jesus' every action, his every pursuit was not anxiety-filled or compulsory, but steeped in delight. He only wanted to do what Father wanted. We function out of the Father's delight, not in an attempt to secure it.

All (4) of the biographers of Jesus have these (2) things in common: first, they all tell the story of Jesus as if what was happening was the climax/pinnacle of the story in which they had been informed and formed for generations. It was happening; it had happened.

Second, all of the gospel writings appear to be passion narratives with really long introductions. You never get the sense that the characters or the circumstances are simply 'incidental', but you do sense that they are all pointing to/leading to a climactic moment. They give attention and detail to Jesus' death above any other facet or movement in his life.

It is this call to follow Jesus which, for Mark (8:27-9:9), becomes the pivotal movement from Galilee to Jerusalem. *"Who do people say I am?"* and *"If anyone wants to be my follower..."*

We tend to make any number of bold declarations, but we discover how little those faith professions really demand of us until we hit Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the place of confrontation. It's where kingdoms collide. It's where we either lose our life to find it, or cling to our own version of it and forfeit the possibility of life, altogether. There are no empty professions in Jerusalem, only costly companionship or betrayal.

Jesus believes that the events to transpire will alter the course of history, therefore, the call-response must be commensurate with the significance of the events. Everything is about to change. We must change.

In this process, I must renounce all that I believe to be most essential about me: my will, my desires; sovereignty over my own life. I must die.

The call to obedience was concise and clear and because of the nature of the call, Jesus knew that it could not be accommodated by anything other than devotion (singleness of heart). If it's a voice that you have not heard--- one with which you are unfamiliar--- it would be difficult to grasp the compelling nature of the invitation.

Most of what happens in salvation is beyond us; it is inaccessible to us so that our only reasonable posture is one of receptivity--- welcoming salvation instead of attempting to manufacture it.

Not that it doesn't require anything of us, but something "more" of us: more than good "God-manners"; more than a renewed commitment to participation in our "God-habits".

Those things can prove to be just another form of “striving”, with a religious spin on them. If they are making us even less sure, more anxious, and more determined to resolve this thing on our own, they are simply another form of self-righteousness: attempting to make ourselves acceptable, apart from grace.

As long as we assume that salvation is the result of another self-imposed strategy, “control” will be our motivator, “fear” will be our posture, and “losing” will be unacceptable.

As we minimize the work of grace, we maximize our efforts, and increase our capacity for rejection. You will have to ensure that your spouse fulfills you, your kids validate you, your job recognizes you, and your God pleases you.

“Jesus had to go through Samaria” (John 4:4).

If Jesus would have used his “Waze” app, he would have confirmed that the shortest way to Jerusalem was through Samaria. They didn’t like you cutting through their yard!

Samaria is where we will spend the greater part of our lives [The Samaritans were considered ‘half-breeds’ with a hybrid faith that was an amalgamation of Judaism and idolatry]. Samaritans neither share our beliefs nor our conclusions about God and life in his world, but by intentionally journeying in and amongst them, Jesus was, in some fashion, helping to establish the context for mission.

Jesus lived his life from a divine sense of “must”.

Jesus demonstrated a life that was completely his own. He was free to give it to whomever or whatever he pleased.

“No one takes my life from me. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to pick it back up again” (John 10:17-18).

Most of our anxiety--- most of our fruitless activity--- is the result of not knowing “who we are” or “what we must do”.

Surrender is the response that initiates the life-long journey of transformation--- growing into who you are in God-- but, submission is not our default mode... management is.

We try to compensate for our lack of control with a flurry of meaningless activity. Even though none of our actions are proving to be of any consequence, anything else feels like concession.

Surrender is not about being “over-powered” or “over-taken” by God.

It’s not passivity. It’s not simply about “losing our will”, but “*voluntarily cooperating with the will of another*” (def.)

God gives us (2) particular movements--- graces--- which are essential in the surrendered-life:

confession- it is the safe confines in which we can honestly confront our brokenness and learn to live life “*out in the open*”, not without sin, just without pretense.

Confession (‘to say the same thing’) is a means of altering my agreements--- those things which I am giving permission to carry weight in my life.

repentance- is the gift that God gives us which not only allows us to admit our brokenness, but provides the courage to live differently--- to choose a less self-destructive path for our lives.

It is easy to surrender to the will of another once you trust that the other is 'for' you; when they have consistently deferred to you and have subordinated their own needs to yours. Until then, there is only unfulfilled longings and lingering questions about your own worth.