**God’s Most Unfair Trade:** Embrace your Cross and find joy

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| 05.02-03.15 | MHC | Matt 16:24-26 | Take up your cross and find true life | 30 min |

Opening Comments: My heart for you

* Today is an emotional one for me: God has been clear through circumstances that he has another assignment for me. Pastor of Grace Chapel. Still part of the Kingdom.
* You’ll remember the passage Pastor Mike preached a few weeks ago from Acts 20: **Paul gave a speech to the Elders in Ephesus in Acts Chapter 20, two verses:**
  + **V 20: “I did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable for you”** – and my prayer is that you will not neglect God’s words.
  + **I’ve not only given you the gospel, I’ve given you my life**. Today I intend to give you God’s word & the gospel one more time from this meeting place.
* **What to preach**? **So many things to say. So many things I want to leave you with.** 1 message above all that I hope for you – for us – to grasp! ABIDE IN HIM.

Prayer and Introduction (Pray for Nepal earthquake victims)

**Attn: Gasper Kaplitz** (A-1): We hear these and wonder, *would I have done that?* Or maybe even more assuredly we say, *I know I wouldn’t have done that, but I’d like to think that I would.*

**God used great men and women to proclaim His glory** and He still is looking for men and women to use but we take that lightly. *How can he use me and my life?*

* 86 yr old martyr, Polycarp, burned said: **“86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”**

**Relv:** We say that we follow Christ, but have we picked up our cross? Do we know what that really means? Have we counted the cost? Save and unsaved, young and old.

**Theme: Matt 16:24-26 says,** “Take Up Your Cross… and follow me.” Imagine the thoughts that would have been going through the minds of the disciples when they saw JC take up his cross. **A roman death & torture device** now being used as a call of God

**Why are you Here and What do you want?**

* You don’t think of your venture to church as an equipping step for the hardships in life you’ll face. **Life for you is full of other trials demanding your faith**.
* **Why are you here? \*** b/c this is what you’ve always done, **\*** b/c you were transformed and have remained since, **\*** for your kids, **\*** b/c you need help or hope
* **Why would you stay?** This Christianity thing is full of paradoxical statements that are hard to understand, yet alone live out – Lose your life to gain it; joy in trials, etc.
* **What if I told you that today I could give you something that would revolutionize your relationship with God, would you believe me?** Some would say:***\**** *I’m sure I’ve heard it, I’ve been here a long time,* ***\**** *you’re a preacher, of course you’d say that,* ***\**** *one more thing to try to do when I’ve already failed… sounds helpless.* ***\**** *Give it! I’ll try anything.*
* **Story of the miners** (A-2): w/ excitement and expectation follow me to the deep mine of God’s wisdom in the words of Christ and find unspeakable truth that transf.

Mark 8:34-37 – a promised gift of life.

**Context**: vv31-33 Jesus foretold about his death. “Far be it from you lord! Peter said

* **“You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** When man’s will gets in the way of God’s will it is always a hindrance. Man’s will can be overcome by God’s, but still a hindrance.
* V34 – **“If anyone would come after me”** – Path is narrow. It’s a choice demands faith, perseverance and courage. God divinely calls, will you willfully answer?
  + **No more easy-believism**: We have made Christianity about what we get, not what He gets through a life surrendered to Him. It asks for your life. No add-on
* **“Take up your cross”** – deny-sell will and embrace God’s will, no matter the cost.
* “For” 3 times – 3 reasons for leaving your life behind and embracing “The Cross”:

1. 35 - **If you live for you, rather than what God has for you**, you’ll miss life.
2. 36 - **What value is it to have everything in the world, but miss a relationship with God** – your creator – in this life and the next?
3. 37 - **He will give judgment to those who lived for themselves and reward (righteousness) for those who live for God**. Our greatest reward is being claimed as His! – Not being ashamed in “adulterous and sinful generation”

God’s most unfair trade: **LOOSE YOUR LIFE TO GAIN IT**

* I don’t have to “Do” or “Not do” anything. I just have to believe in Jesus as the one way to God­–the only righteous one and repent. Explain “believe and repent.”
* **What do I gain? GOD!** Access to my creator through my redeemer.

**So What does it really mean to follow Christ in our life?** (Start MY cross)

1. **My Deepest desires are from Him and for Him.** I’ve see this! Sex, drugs, alcohol

* **What if the good things I desire have not come or fallen apart**? Singleness. Thought you married a knight and you actually married a nightmare; for better or for worse and it is mostly worse; children out of control – continually disappointment). By identifying this, you’ll see your need for greater dependence.
* **Psalm 145:19** – “He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him” and Ps 37:4, “Delight yourself I the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

1. **My Joy is complete in Him.** This is when we can say with Paul (who wrote from a prison cell) Phil 3:8 – I consider it all rubbish compared to knowing Christ. Keith
2. **My guilt is gone**. **This is a serious disease we try to cure it with everything else but the cross of Christ.** The Gospel is freedom from wrath, but also Guilt!

* **mom’s scared hands of love** (A-3)**:** He sacrificed himself for us. Hide now in Him.

1. **My will is abandon**. Offer yourself as a living sacrifice (the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar). Not a one time, but over and over.

* Josh, be Authentic – share that taking up your cross is hard for you. God sustains.
* **Following Jesus is easy when life runs smoothly; our true commitment to Him is revealed during change/trials**. JC assured us that trials will come (Jn 16:33). Discipleship demands sacrifice, and JC never hid that cost. Love propels me.

1. **My footing is secure**. What I do, I do out of conviction and obedience, not out of my will or compulsion. I stand with my back at the cross and the sword in my hand.

* No amount of happiness can bait me away, no suffering push me back b/c I get it.

He knows where we’re at & calls us to greater faith: **Blind man at Bethsaida** (Mk 8:22)

**Christ called me to ‘Take up my Cross” and follow him.**

* **Let’s be clear about what Jesus didn’t mean.** Many ppl interpret “cross” as some burden they must carry: a strained relationship, a thankless job, a physical illness. With self-pitying pride, they say, “That’s my cross I have to carry.” T**his is not what Jesus meant when He said, “Take up your cross and follow Me.”**
* **It means total dedication and dependence on the power of JC in my life**

1. **“Come after", He means "to come to a point of being with" Him.**
2. **You either deny self to live for Christ or you deny Christ to live for self.**
3. **Taking up the cross daily means considering yourself already dead to the world.** Paul said in Galatians 6 “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.”
   * (message) “For my part, I am going to boast about nothing but the Cross of our Master, Jesus Christ. Because of that Cross, I have been crucified in relation to the world, set free from the stifling atmosphere of pleasing others and fitting into the little patterns that they dictate.”

**Before you knew Jesus you were on a quest for personal fulfillment and the meaning of life. Now if you know Jesus, you’ve found it.** You’re done. You’re life in this world is over from a self-fulfillment point of view. The only thing left to do is to know Christ and to make him known. The world has nothing for you. And the more you continue to pursue happiness in the world, the unhappier you will become.

Conclusion:

1. **I want nothing more for you than to see you presented to God, complete in Christ:**

* **Stay committed to Christ**: even when it doesn’t make sense, don’t fall away.
* **Read God Word** and let the Bible, with the power of the HS and prayer, be your lifeblood spiritually to make it through this life practically.
* **Keep your eyes on the prize** of the upward calling of knowing Jesus Christ our Lord (Hebrews 12)

1. **We are in this together**: (1) our pursuit of Christ and our (2) Gospel work in south Denver. I have MHC DNA in me now; we will work together so all many know.
2. **Trust that God is not surprised by the timing of this**! While my leaving and Mike’s leaving at the same time doesn’t make a lot of sense, God being in control always makes sense. To not lean in on His plan would be disobedience to His will.
3. **I have loved being one of your pastors!** Teaching, counseling, praying loving.

* You have helped me to love God more than you will ever know. Thank you.

A-1: Gasper Kaplitz - 86 six year old man, one of the men persecutited in Bohemia and Germany for his faith. Probably about 1000 years after Christ or 1000 years ago.

Being led to his execution, he addresses the principle officer overseeing his public death.

“Behold and unworthy an ancient man, who half often in treated God to take him out of this wicked world but could not till now obtain his desire; for God reserve me till these years to be a spectacle to the world, and a sacrifice to himself: therefore God's will be done”

The officer told him that in consideration of his old age that if he would ask pardon, he would immediately receive it.

“Ask Pardon!” He retorted, “I ask pardon of God, Home I frequently affect, but not the emperor who I have not injured at all. Before you, I have done nothing wrong. I die innocent with a clear conscience.”

“Do not separate me from the noble men of faith who have gone before me to heaven.”

He cheerfully resigned his neck to the block.

(From The Book of Martyrs ... Forming a complete history of martyrdom from the … By John Foxe)

A-2: THE GOLD MINERS WITH GLOWING FACES

I like the story about 5 prospectors who found a rich vein of gold in California during the gold rush days. They realized what a great discovery they had, & decided, "We’ve a really good thing going here as long as no one else finds out about it." So they each took a vow to keep it secret.

Then they headed for town to file their claims & get the equipment necessary to mine the gold. True to their vows, they didn’t say a word to anybody. They filed their claim, bought the equipment, & headed back to their mine. But when they did, a crowd of people followed them.

And the reason was because the expression on their faces had given them away. Their faces were aglow in anticipation of the wealth that soon would be theirs. People knew that they must have found something very special. So a crowd followed them out of town.

A-3: A MOTHER'S MARRED HANDS

There was a teenager who didn’t want to be seen in public with her mother, because her mother’s arms were terribly disfigured. One day when her mother took her shopping and reached out her hand, a clerk looked horrified. Later, crying, the girl told her how embarrassed she was.

Understandably hurt, the mother waited an hour before going to her daughter’s room to tell her, for the first time, what happened.

"When you were a baby, I woke up to a burning house. Your room was an inferno. Flames were everywhere. I could have gotten out the front door, but I decided I’d rather die with you than leave you to die alone. I ran through the fire and wrapped my arms around you. Then I went back through the flames, my arms on fire. When I got outside on the lawn, the pain was agonizing but when I looked at you, all I could do was rejoice that the flames hadn’t touched you."

Stunned, the girl looked at her mother through new eyes. Weeping in shame and gratitude, she kissed her mother’s marred hands and arms.

(Source: Randy Alcorn. From a sermon by Billy Ricks, Suffering, 2/27/2011)