



Jesus Calls

Racial Justice Day

John 1:43-51

Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

January 14, 2018

Thought for the Week

"Okay, it's time to make a decision."

I often make this statement to my friends while placing our order at one of our favorite restaurants. They have many wonderful strengths, but choosing from a familiar menu is not one of them.

Notice I said, "familiar." We are creatures of habit and therefore frequent the same local restaurants. I dare say that many of us, can easily quote word-for-word the entire menu at our favorite restaurant. Most of the servers know exactly how we would like it prepared. Sometimes I will say, "Just tell them it's for Paul or Jim or Gordy and they will know what to do."

My friends are well-acquainted with the menu, in fact they often speak with amazement to our friends of how good all the food choices are, yet they struggle to make a decision as to which specific thing they are going to commit to eat! If this doesn't describe you, surely you know someone it does.

I believe our culture is filled with people for whom the same struggle applies in regard to spiritual things – specifically in their response to Jesus. Following Jesus is a life-changing adventure and all are invited to "follow Him" but few, it seems, will go all the way.

All four Gospel writers record Jesus calling others to "follow" Him. Mark wastes no time getting to the point when Jesus calls individuals to fully commit their lives to Him. In fact, we might well say Mark immediately confronts his readers with a call to a genuine sincere relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Mark is written with a sense of urgency. In fact, the word translated in the New International Version "immediately" (eutheos) in some form is used over 40 times in the Gospel.

After a brief introduction Mark describes Jesus traveling through the region of Galilee, calling people to "repent and believe the good news!" He allows us to envision Jesus preaching to the multitude yet gives the reader the opportunity to look through Jesus' eyes as He sees and calls Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John to "follow" Him.

The text says they "immediately left" and followed Him. If you are not careful you will envision Jesus approaching four men for the very first time and saying "Hey guys, I'm Jesus. Though you've never met me before I'm calling you to lay aside everything and follow me for the rest of your life – in fact, the rest of eternity." The reality is that this was not the case.

A careful study of all four Gospels will clearly reveal that these four men were already well “acquainted” with Jesus. In fact they, like many to whom Jesus preached, were “amazed” by His teaching and the miracles He performed. Likewise, many in our culture today are acquainted with Jesus – they have heard of Him and know He “saves sinners.” Greater still, many today will recognize and admit that Jesus has done an amazing work in the life of someone they know.

For example – recently a young mother was in the hospital following an emergency C-section delivery of a baby girl who had an ischemic stroke at birth. When a doctor walked into her hospital room to find a nurse at her bedside holding the mother’s hand. The nurse was crying.

He asked, “Is something wrong?”

The nurse looked at him and said, “I am amazed at this young woman’s faith in Jesus! I want to be like her.”

The sad fact is many in our culture today are not willing to fully follow Jesus. We must recognize that many people who are acquainted with Jesus in this life will spend forever in hell separated from Him. Simply being acquainted with Jesus is not enough. Hell will also be filled with people who were “amazed” by Jesus Christ and his miracle-working power. But being amazed by Jesus is not enough either.

Our study of the Bible verses indicates that Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John were moved beyond mere acquaintance and amazement to the point of complete abandonment. The text says, “at once (eutheos) they left their nets and followed him” and “without delay (eutheos) He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.”

There comes the time when a decision must be made – “What am I going to do with Jesus of Nazareth?” John 6:66 is a verse that should break the heart of every Christian – “... from this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him (Jesus).” Following Jesus involves a sincere, genuine willingness to “let go” of many things and follow Him in complete abandonment.

Jesus calls us to “repent and believe.” To repent is to turn from one direction to another. To believe means more than mere intellectual acknowledgement. In addition to the intellect, the will must respond in practical application. Like the disciples who “left” everything and followed Jesus, we must come to that point where we declare, “I have decided to follow Jesus; no turning back, no turning back.”

Everyone, it is time to make a decision.

The Fear Of God

Scriptures – Psalm 103:13, Psalm 130:4, Job 31:23,28, John 16:27, 1John 3:1-3, 1Peter 1:17-19

*‘Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially,
live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear’ [1Peter 1:17].*

Because of the self-centeredness and innate legalistic bent of our hearts we probably focus on the command at the end of this verse – that we live our lives in reverent fear. We tend to read the Bible with ourselves at the forefront, asking ‘what is this telling me to do?’ And Peter does indeed tell us what to do, but his command is based on a very significant double-barreled motivational priority.

The first motivational truth is that God is our ‘Father’ – ‘we call on a Father’. The God, in whose presence we, as Christians, are to live in reverent fear, is not some distant, unknowable, unapproachable, implacable deity. He is not hard-hearted. He is not merciless. He is our Father.

In the words of David: ‘As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him’ [Psalm 103:13].

In the words of Jesus: ‘... the Father himself loves you ...’ [John 16:27].

In the words of John: 'How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!' [1John 3:1].

The appropriate response to the love and mercy of God is to be overwhelmed by its unexpectedness, its immensity, its sheer, stupendous generosity and liberality. And, in the depths of this reverential awe, to know beyond the slightest doubt, that we no longer belong to ourselves, to live for ourselves, but to him, to live for him, to glorify him.

Thus Peter said: '... live your lives ... in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ' [1Peter 1:17-19].

And John said: '... now we are children of God ... everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as he is pure' [1John 3:2,3].

And David said: 'with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared' [Psalm 130:4].

But we can go even further back into the history of faith, and find Job explaining why he chose not to sin:

'... for fear of his splendor I could not do such things ... for I would have been unfaithful to God on high ...' [Job 31:23,28].

This man, with no knowledge of God as Father, and without the evidence of God's love demonstrated at Calvary, knew that reverential fear, not freedom to sin, was the rational and appropriate expression of faith. How much more should we, who call God 'Father', and who have been redeemed by the blood of his Son, live our lives in reverent fear!