



Lose Your Life or Save It?

Mark 8:31-38

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

February 25, 2018

Thought for the Week

FREEDOM – A KEY FACT OF THE GOSPEL

The Bible uses a number of words that convey the concept of freedom as an outcome of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: liberty, salvation, freedom, ransom, redemption, being set free, and deliverance. We read texts like:

"... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but ... to give his life a *ransom* for many' [Mark 10:45].

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has *redeemed* his people" [Luke 1: 68].

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me ... He has sent me to proclaim *freedom* for the prisoners ... and to *release* the oppressed' [Luke 4:18].

"... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you *free*" [John 8:32].

"... if the Son sets you *free*, you will be *free* indeed' [John 8:36].

"... we have been *released* from the law so that we may serve in the new way of the Spirit" [Romans 7:6].

"... through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has *set me free* from the law of sin and death" [Romans 8:2].

"It is for *freedom* that Christ has set us *free*" [Galatians 5:1]

"In him we have *redemption* through his blood" [Ephesians 1:7].

"... he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... *free* those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death' [Hebrews 2:14,15].

"... you were *redeemed* ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect' [1Peter 1:18,19].

This concept of freedom as an outcome of the Gospel presupposes that prior to this liberating impact of the Gospel we were in a condition that made release or deliverance necessary: that prior to this action of the Gospel we were *not free*, and, in addition, that we were *not able to free ourselves*.

This Gospel freedom is a precious and costly gift; as such it is meant to be treasured and enjoyed, not ignored or abused.

THE COST OF FREEDOM

Gospel freedom is termed 'redemption' and as such is always freedom at a cost.

Gospel freedom is not arbitrary – it is the result of a deliberate decision by God to bear whatever cost it takes to set us free.

The concept of 'ransom' is commonly used in notes written by kidnappers. Release from captivity and restoration to one's loved ones is promised on the payment of the 'ransom'. The 'ransom' is the cost of freedom.

The New Testament describes very clearly what the cost of Gospel freedom is:

The Son of Man came to 'give *his life* as a ransom for many' [Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45].

We 'have redemption through *his blood*' [Ephesians 1:7].

Jesus Christ '*gave himself* a ransom' [1Timothy 2:6].

Jesus '*gave himself* for us to redeem us' [Titus 2:14]
Jesus was fully human 'so that by *his death* he might ... free those ...' [Hebrews 2:14,15].
Jesus obtained eternal redemption for us 'by *his own blood*' (Heb. 9):
We were redeemed 'with the precious *blood of Christ*' [1Peter 1:19].
Jesus purchased us for God by *his 'blood'* [Revelation 5:9].

The death of Jesus Christ is the cost of Gospel freedom.

In addition, Gospel freedom, and its cost, is embedded in the will of God from eternity – before he created the world, before time began, this death of the incarnate Son of God for human redemption was inevitable, because God had so willed it. This cost, this death, this freedom, were real in eternity before time, and human life, began.

Believers were 'chosen in him *before the creation of the world*' [Ephesians 1:4].
Gospel grace was given to us in Christ '*before the beginning of time*' [2Timothy 1:9].
Jesus is the Lamb '*slain from the creation of the world*' [Rev. 13:8].

And here we realize a deep, deep truth that is overwhelming in the utter magnificence of its mercy and grace: that God created human beings knowing that we would sin, knowing that at his appointed time he would send his own beloved Son into the world to pay this horrific price necessary to set us free. He did not have to create us. He did not have to pay the price. But he did. So great, so strong, so immeasurable is his love for us.

Happy Birthday Heather (2/25) & Donna (2/27)

The Two Houses

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

The story of the wise and foolish builders is Jesus' final point in his now famous 'Sermon on the Mount'. Throughout this lengthy sermon he has been teaching us the radical identity of those who truly believe in him and drawing out the radical inner meaning that is at the center of a genuine God-honoring lifestyle.

Here at the end of his message he hammers home the urgent necessity of making sure we belong to the kingdom of heaven. Here, at the end of a whole chapter commending discernment he is warning us to make the right judgment, to exercise acute discernment, regarding our own personal spiritual standing.

- He has taught us that we must get ourselves in order before we start trying to fix our brother (7:3-5);
- He has taught us that we must make judgment's when communicating God's truth (7:6)
- He has instructed us to make a decisive judgment about which way of life we follow: we must enter the 'narrow gate', not the wide popular one (7:13-14);
- He has warned us to watch out for false teachers, whose deception is so subtle that it is almost impossible to detect them (7:15-20);
- He has cautioned us not to be deceived by the outward trappings of religion, that we must remember that religious words and activities can come from a godless person, and that the working of miracles does not automatically identify genuine faith (7:21-23).

Then, in this parable, Jesus challenges us: are you building your life on the right foundation? Is it a foundation that can survive life's storms that blow up at any time with devastating force? Can it stand in the agonies of suffering? Can it remain standing when Satan has battered it - pushing, poking, prodding, pressuring you to give up your faith and do what Job's wife advised him - to curse God and die? Will it survive the pressures and subtleties of false teaching? And, importantly, can it stand that devastating and final storm, which is the judgment of God?

True faith survives the pressure, not because it is strong faith, not because it is great faith, but because it is faith grounded in Jesus Christ and his words. *Temptation in the Bible is only rarely the temptation to commit a moral sin: it is overwhelmingly intense pressure to give up one's faith in and commitment to the Lord.* True faith survives both life's pressures and God's judgment - because it is faith whose focus and object has ultimate, absolute and permanent worth: Jesus Christ.

Here in this parable of the two houses, or rather the two foundations, is the answer to the choices we have been commanded to make in the preceding verses.