

The Cost of Clarity

Psalm 22:23-3
Mark 8:31-38

February 25, 2018
Faith Community

Today's New Testament passage says that Christ told his disciples he was to undergo great suffering, be killed and then rise from the dead. They needed to know this, so Christ spoke clearly. The passage reads,

He said this all quite openly. (Mark 8:32)

We'll look at the short-term result, the long-term result and the ultimate outcome of this clarity.

First of all, note the short-term, reading verse 32:

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. (v.32)

Peter loved Jesus; he didn't want him to go through that. But there was a certain fact of life at work here, and it applies to this day:

Beware of well-intentioned roadblocks. This takes great discernment.

The suffering that Christ described was what his life was to be about, it would be the fulfillment of everything, and the voice of sympathy, however well intended, would get in the way, it would short circuit the process and defeat the whole thing.

Beware the voice of sympathy in your life when it would be counterproductive to what's needed.

Watch Christ's immediate response to this well-intentioned roadblock:

Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns. (v.33)

Peter, of course, must've felt shocked, but the deeper issue remained. Beware of well-intentioned roadblocks.

Then we turn to the long-term result of clarity. Now Jesus is talking to everyone, not just Peter. He knows a teachable moment when he sees it, and says this, in verses 34 and 5:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

It's not so much a judgement as it is a statement of fact. It's a way of life. Play it safe and you'll lose. Instead,

- Develop healthy disciplines.
- Cultivate authentic relationships, the ones that call you to be open and vulnerable.
- Discover where you're gifted and put your giftedness to work.
- Become a courageous giver, give at such a level that it costs you dearly.

This isn't just the way to survive; it's how to grow. And where there's no growth, there's death. Those who want to save their lives will lose them. And that's the long-term result. Play it safe and you'll lose.

Tony Campolo tells a wonderful story of an event at his church:

“On the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day, we ask the college students of our church to give us reports of how their times at school are going. It's a very special Sunday because ours is a Black Baptist church. Our older members haven't had the educational opportunities that our young people enjoy, so they love to hear about what their children and grandchildren are learning.

“On one such Sunday, after half a dozen students had given their reports, my pastor got up and delivered some closing words. ‘Children,’ he said, ‘you're going to die! You may not think you're going to die. But you're going to die. One of these days, they're going to take you out to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face, and go back to the church and eat potato salad.

“How will people feel when you die? The answer depends on whether you live to get titles or you live to get testimonies.

“When they lay you in the grave, are people going to stand around reciting the fancy titles you earned, or are they going to stand around giving testimonies of the good things you did for them?

Will they list your degrees and awards, or will they tell about what a blessing you were?

Will you leave behind a newspaper column telling how important you were, or will you leave crying people who give testimonies of how they've lost their best friend? There's nothing wrong with titles. Titles are good things to have. But if it ever comes down to a choice between a title or a testimony, go for the testimony.'

"Then he went on a 'poetic rip.' He went on the kind of rip that makes Black preaching extra special. He went through the Bible talking about those people who had titles and the ones who had testimonies. He rhythmically shouted his sermon, each line stronger than the one before:

Pharaoh may have had the title...
But Moses had the testimony!

Nebuchadnezzar may have had the title...
But Daniel had the testimony!

Queen Jezebel may have had the title...
But Elijah had the testimony!

"He went on and on like that, citing on the one hand Biblical characters who had power and prestige, and on the other, the people of God whose lives were testimonies of loving service. Each line and refrain was greeted with shouts of godly praise from the congregation. The people shouted....more loudly and more enthusiastically with each refrain....This preacher was 'on' and people were being blessed. He kept it up, hammering away at the contrasts that exist between those who have the titles and those who have the testimonies. When he got to the climax of his message, he simply screamed, 'Pilate may have had the title-'...then he paused for what seemed like an eternity before letting fly...'But my Jesus had the testimony!'"¹

So what'll it be? Are you going to go for the title? Or will the testimony be your target? It's the most important decision you'll ever make.

Short term: Beware of well-intentioned roadblocks.

Long term: Play it safe and you'll lose.

¹ Tony Campolo, Who Switched the Price Tags? (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), pp. 58-60.

What about the ultimate point in this exercise of clarity?
Listen to verse 36:

What good is it to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? (v. 36)

Bill Hybels, pastor of the Willow Creek Church in Chicago, tells of a woman who visited his church and in short order became quite active. She was listed in a national magazine as one of the ten most powerful people in American business. She was fabulously wealthy, enormously powerful, and the day came when she asked her pastor to stop and visit.

She greeted him at her estate, and in the course of the visit shared much of what led to her position of power, influence, and wealth. But then she told him that she'd developed a deadly and rapidly spreading form of cancer. She was given no hope at all. What she said next put it all together for her in her final days.

"I guess I've done a pretty good job of gaining the whole world but losing my soul." And she knew it was time to do something about it, so she accepted Jesus Christ into her life.

So vicious and rapid was the cancer that she died two and a half weeks later.

Her memorial service was at the church, and it was such that business leaders from around the world arrived in their corporate planes, there were security people and security sweeps galore, and when it came time for his personal comments in the service, Bill Hybels said that the one statement this woman wanted to be read at her funeral, in front of some of the most powerful people in the world, was this:

What good is it to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?

And you don't need to be fabulously wealthy for it to happen. It happens all the time, even with regular folks like you and I. The best is too often sacrificed on the altar of sympathy, convenience, or expediency.

Don't let any of that get in the way of what God wants to do in and through you.

People, we live in a time of great need but equally great opportunity. Go home and read this passage, study it, see how it speaks to you. What part of your life are you holding back? You may call it common sense but it may very well be coming between you and authentic commitment to the life changing Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ was perfectly clear in this passage. And people still allowed things to get in the way of the Good News. Today, as we look at the cost of clarity, don't let that happen to you.