

I'm going to do things slightly differently this morning: we normally start with the scripture but this morning I'm not going to start with the scripture because I just want to stir up a little interest in what you think the scripture that we're going to be focussing on is.

Considering the fact that that we have four Gospels, and the Gospels are essentially biographies, there's actually very little historical information about the life of Jesus that's recorded in the Gospels, and there are some pretty good reasons for that. One is that John wrote his Gospel around 30 years after the others, and they each prepared theirs in relative isolation - Matthew and Luke took theirs in large part from Mark, but John wrote his completely separately and he did it because he wasn't interested in being repetitive, he was interested in complementing the material that was already written, so he wrote his very very differently. So there's also very little in John's account that's present in the other Gospels. But here's the total amount that the four Gospels have in common (and I'm talking about each of the four Gospels), we have certain healings and miracles that are recorded in a couple of them but this is what's in all four: there are three predictions and four stories:

The three predictions they all mention are:

- Jesus foretelling his betrayal;
- Peter's denial of Christ; and
- Jesus' expectation of suffering,

and the four stories they all mention are:

- the baptism of Christ;
- the feeding of the five thousand;
- the triumphal entry; and
- the passion (or the crucifixion and the resurrection) of Christ.

And that's it! And in fact there's only one of Christ's verbal teachings that's contained in each of the four Gospels - I wonder if you could guess what it is? (I'm not going to show you yet.)

If you were directing a film production based upon the biblical writings and you wanted to emphasise one particular teaching of Jesus by placing it in the forefront of your production I wonder which one you would choose. What we can know for sure is that if there's only one teaching of Jesus to be found in each of the four Gospels, then it must have been of paramount importance to Him, and it must also by consequence be of paramount importance to us. So there is a teaching, this one common teaching, and it's present in six separate places in the Gospels: Matthew records it twice, Mark once, Luke twice, and John once. And when you study the context in which these teaching incidences you'll notice they are pointing at four distinct events:

1. first you have Jesus' third and final tour of Galilee, his home state or province if you like, and that's interesting because it's only in his home town that a prophet is without honour - that's what Jesus said when he gave this teaching in his final teaching to his people before he left [Matthew 10:39];
2. it secondly in Jesus' visit to Caesarea Philippi, which is the one that we're going to focus one, and that's recorded three times in the Gospels [Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24];

3. it's recorded in his final journey to Jerusalem [Luke 17:33] when Jesus was approaching the time of his death, the time of his passion; and
4. it's then finally recorded during his final week in Jerusalem [John 12:25], and it's one of the final teachings that he delivers before fully and finally facing his destiny which he's pronounced in these ways.

So we have these two unique characteristics about this teaching which we're going to look at:

1. it's the only teaching of Christ mentioned in all four Gospels; and
2. it's the only teaching of Christ that we know He gave on four separate and distinct occasions.

Would you like me to tell you what it is? I'll give you a hint, and this is a paraphrase of it by a chap called Jim Elliot who was a missionary; he said "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose"

Jim Elliot was a man who lived this teaching out: he went to (I can't remember the name of the tribe he went to in) South America and almost immediately on his arrival they attacked him and murdered him. The most amazing thing about this story is his wife then went to the very same tribe and started evangelising them. And he said that; "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

So I'm now going to go to the scripture and we're going to read it from there. Reading from Mark 8:31-38, Jesus predicts his death.

{Reading Mark 8:31-38}

A summary of it is something along these lines: "Find your life and you'll lose it; lose your life in order to find it." John's wording is slightly different, but it's the same teaching: "Love your life you'll lose; hate your life you'll keep it." It's quite an amazing teaching and this was the most paramount and frequently recorded teaching of our master: If you love your life you'll lose it therefore hate your life; it almost leads to this expectation that sometimes non-Christians have of Christians being a people who are willing to line up like lemmings to jump off cliffs, or volunteers queuing up before a firing squad – somehow just sacrifice everything because we apparently hate life and we just can't wait to get out of the world. But that's not what it's all about.

There was a song written in the '90s by a band called The Stone Roses which is entitled "I Am the Resurrection" and it mocks Jesus' teaching, and includes a lyric saying: "I couldn't ever bring myself to hate you as I hate life." But that's a cruel and vicious mockery of Jesus' teaching, it's a corruption of his teaching. He's not advocating hating life, except where that life is being lived without reference to the one who is the giver of life. What he is asserting is that any life which is lived without reference to the Creator is absent of any kind of security, or of any kind of everlasting value.

And once this teaching gets under your skin, you start to see applications of it everywhere. You also see it in literature – not only in scripture but also in literature – and in popular media. There is a reason that the context in which Jesus delivered the teaching was different in each of the four events listed; it's because it's a message that relates to virtually every area of life.

My question today, and perhaps my challenge is: to what degree have you heard this message (and you can't be said to have heard a message in the Bible, or from the Bible, unless you've actually begun to obey it – hearing and obeying are intrinsically and inextricably linked: if you're

not obeying a teaching you haven't heard the teaching)? So to what extent have you heard this teaching and begun to process and work this teaching out? Without forcing you to answer, I just invite you to think about it and to explore it with me.

There are three things Jesus commanded of his disciples:

1. he said "Follow me";
2. he said "Trust in me"; and
3. he said "Abide in me".

These three things can be boiled down to: Obey, Believe and Live. And he gave them in that order. You might think, "Well, shouldn't it say Believe, Obey and Live?" But it's not. It starts with obedience; and obedience actually provokes and builds Faith because you start to see that the teaching has purpose and has value, and it starts to actually make sense when you obey it. And then Life comes. That's how it works. So I wanted to give you three examples of people who walked with Jesus.

The first one is Peter. Peter who was less concerned with who Jesus was than what he wanted Jesus to be for him and what he wanted Jesus to do for him, but who finally realised that the only way he could ever serve Christ fully was to focus on the extent to which he knew and loved him: knowing Jesus, knowing Jesus. It is more important to know Jesus than to recognise him for who he is. And it might sound strange that it's more important to know him and love him as a person; until you do know him and love him as a person it's difficult to see any kind of resonance in what he did because the crucifixion and resurrection don't have any kind of personal application.

The second one is Mary. Mary, the sister of Martha (and you might remember from the story of when Jesus came to visit Mary and Martha, Martha was busy in the kitchen and Mary got chastised because she was sitting at Jesus' feet, but you see Mary) was less concerned with what other people thought of her, and what she knew Jesus could do for her, and what she got from being with Jesus in his presence than she was being concerned about what her sister was concerned about what she was doing - she wasn't concerned about doing something to look a certain way, she was more interested in sitting at Jesus' feet and getting what she needed from his presence and his teaching. You also see this with John (John the disciple whom Jesus loved) leaning on his chest whilst all the rest of them were arguing about who was the greatest.

And then finally you've got Paul who was so shaken by the realisation that all he had in his life was all about him, and had nothing to do with Jesus, when Jesus called him and appeared to him his first question was "Who are you?" - he didn't know who he was. That was the most fundamental question that came to his spirit. Here therefore he cast it all aside and offered himself (just the way that we were singing): he offered everything he had as nothing so that he could gain Christ, and that he could gain Life.

I want to give you three illustrations which will hopefully bring some of this teaching alive a little bit:

There's some tribes people in Africa and they hunt and trap monkeys. And the way that they do it is that they take a termite mound and they cut a little hole in the termite mound and they put some food in it for the monkey to come and smell and dig out. But the thing about the trap is that the monkey can just about get his hand in like that (when his palm's open) but then he has to grab the food and make a fist and it's not big enough to get his hand out. But rather than when he sees the tribes people coming along to get him just dropping the food and taking his hand out, he's so concerned with holding onto the food that he just keeps holding onto it and that's how he gets

trapped. We can be like that with things that are based upon our appetites, our ambitions, our aspirations for what we want, and we just, rather than letting those things go and find the freedom that God wants us to have in life, hold on to these things so tightly because we're desperate to keep them, we think that it's all that we've got; and if we just let them go and find freedom, we'll find food somewhere else – the monkey would find food somewhere else.

The second one (and I haven't put this on the screen because I would have had to actually in doing the demonstration destroy my phone and my wallet and everything) imaging a water vessel in front of me and it's filled to the brim, but inside that water vessel isn't just water, inside that vessel is my phone and my laptop, and the keys to my car, and the keys to my house, and my wallet, and various other things, am I to same that my life is then filled with faith and with the Holy Spirit? Because what would happen if I took all those things out? You'd find water displacement and when you get to it there'd only be a tiny little bit of water in the bottom because it's so full up with all this other stuff. And the illustration is just to say that if we're to have life full of faith and the Holy Spirit sometimes you have to lighten the load a little bit. The other week Pastor was saying we just need to write some of these things down that we need to let go of: whether there are fears and anxieties that have built up over the last couple of years, or whether they're things we don't necessarily need in life, people we don't necessarily need in our life; if we could let them go and make room for Jesus and make room for the Spirit we'd end up full of faith, and they what would we be able to do?

And the third one is the caterpillar and the butterfly – I think possibly the most amazing creature and when you really start to think about what happens with the caterpillar and butterfly it's absolutely astonishing. The caterpillar is the feeding mechanism, the feeding process of life: the caterpillar just goes out and eats, eats, eats and it gets to the point when it's going to stop but a caterpillar can't reproduce. The only way that a caterpillar is ever going to become something that is going to make another caterpillar is for the caterpillar to change into a butterfly. And for the caterpillar to change into a butterfly is to let everything go, everything about itself – it just drops it into a cocoon and let God, through the natural processes, completely remake it. Have you ever pondered on that? It's completely baffling. It turns into a liquid and then reforms and becomes a butterfly – astonishing beautiful little creatures. And it's the butterfly that reproduces: only a butterfly can make another caterpillar, a caterpillar can't make another caterpillar. As long as we just focus on consumption we cannot bear fruit. We have to let that part of our life go so that we can be remade into something else. (Am I making sense?)

What is there in your life that you would resist giving up if the Lord asked it of you? What is there about the person of Jesus that you are struggling to trust him and which is therefore hampering your faith? And what's missing from your life that only God can provide for you through his Spirit for the sake of his Son?

I just wanted to focus attention on these banners because I see them every week and it's been mentioned this morning. We can't do anything that we think needs to be done in the world, no change in the world that we think needs to be done, can come by our own personal enterprise but through God's Spirit, and through us allowing God's Spirit to fill us and work in us and through us. How can we apply the logic and the benefits of this teaching to our church and to our community, and to what extent are we living in accordance of this teaching of Christ. These are good questions. I hope you don't mind me asking them.

Let's not be stubborn like the monkey holding on to worldly things, so becoming trapped by our selfish desires. Let's empty our water jars of excess weight so that we can make room for the

Spirit and especially for one another. And let's embrace the destiny of the butterfly committing all that we are into the hands of God, so that he can remake us to bear fruit for his glory. In Jesus' name,
Amen.