



The Pastor's Page From Bro. Stan

The Great Exchange

In Mark 8:34-36 Jesus issues this challenge:

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

It dawns on me that we really can't begin to take up the cross until we've first denied ourselves. We have to first empty our hands of all the things that we desire and lust after before we have room to carry a cross. Jesus does not want a share of our affections. He wants our whole heart.

He backs that up by explaining that nothing else brings life. It seems counter-intuitive—when we die to ourselves, we gain the true and eternal life of Christ. But if we seek to grab all the “gusto” of this life and try to feed our selfishness, then we lose everything. Nothing in life can satisfy the spiritual nature that we have. We are spirit beings, but we always try to feed our physical nature. But our physical body will die, so if we gain the whole world, we will someday leave it behind so “what does it profit?”

So after we deny ourselves and take up our cross, how do we live? We just follow Jesus. We read the Word, listen to the Spirit, and go where we sense Jesus going and do what we think He desires us to do. Following Jesus is not knowing exactly what to do all the time, but walking by faith where we cannot see. There's nothing you can give to buy your soul, but if you give it to Jesus, He exchanges it for a brand new one that will last forever. That's a great exchange!

God Can Redeem a Life

We all know that God brings redemption to people as they come to Christ Jesus. But what about those who are saved and then mess up? Can God do anything with a life that has been marred by mistakes? We don't have to look any further than the second book of the New Testament to see an example of a redeemed life.

The Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, the cousin and coworker of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). But Mark almost ended his ministry in failure. Halley explains that "around A.D. 44, Mark went with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 12:25) and started with them on their first missionary journey, but he soon left them and went back (Acts 13:13). Later, around A.D. 50, Mark wanted to go with Paul on his second missionary journey, but Paul refused to take him. This caused the separation of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-39). (Halley, p. 621)

This could have been the end of Mark's ministry. He had failed in such a way that Paul had lost all confidence in him. But Barnabas wouldn't give up on him, and neither would God. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus to begin a missionary journey of their own.

Church history tells us that Mark later became a companion of Peter, and that the Gospel of Mark is written from the eyewitness testimony of Peter as told to Mark. And even Paul finally came around to see the hand of God upon Mark. Halley again explains that "around A.D. 62, Mark appears in Rome with Paul (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24), and four or five years after that, Paul is asking for Mark to come to him (2 Timothy 4:11). Thus it seems that Mark in his later years became one of Paul's close co-workers." (Halley, p. 622)

From failing to complete his first missionary journey, God redeemed Mark's life to become a member of the second missionary team, a close friend of the Apostle Peter, a valued coworker for Paul, and an inspired writer of one of the four Gospels of the New Testament.

So remember, it doesn't matter if you've messed up your past, God can redeem your future.

The Great Commission

I've heard someone say that most people treat the Great Commission like it was a "Great Suggestion" rather than a command from our Lord. Jesus didn't mince words when He told His followers to take the Gospel to the whole world. He didn't give them an option; He just told them to "Go" and do it.

Our Sunday School lesson this week comes from Matthew 28. This chapter is one of the most important in the whole Bible, because it not only gives an eyewitness account of the resurrected Jesus, but it most clearly delineates the mission of the Church and the purpose of the Christian life. We are called by our Lord to “make disciples of all the nations.” A disciple is a “follower” or a “student” or a “learner.” In other words when we take the message of Jesus to our friends and neighbors, we share with them the importance of following Jesus, not just knowing about Him. A disciple submits to the Lordship of Christ. Disciples bow their knees to Jesus and commit to live out His commands for their lives.

How well are you fulfilling the Great Commission in your daily life? How well is our church doing? Because we know we need to do better, we will be hosting a spring semester of FAITH Evangelism Training and Visitation which will meet every Monday night at 6:00 pm for twelve weeks.

I hope you’ll consider signing up to be on one of the FAITH Teams. It will start on February 20th and run until May 7th. You can call the office for more details. We will also need people to help with providing dinners, finding people who need to be visited, and being prayer partners for those who are going out.

There is a place for everyone to be involved in our church’s effort to fulfill our Great Commission. How does your Lord want you to help “make disciples?” It is a great responsibility, but it’s also a great privilege because it comes directly from our Lord.

Is 2012 the End?

In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus when the Temple would be destroyed and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. Instead of pinpointing a time, Jesus told them of all sorts of terrible things that would happen before His return. He spoke of wars and unrest and natural disasters and tribulations and apostasy and false prophets. But He did not give them an exact time. He told them simply to endure to the end, and know that if they did, they would be saved. (24:13)

Jesus also said that the Gospel had to be “preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” before the end would come. That’s where we find ourselves today—in the end times with a call to preach the Gospel to the whole world (Matt 28:19-20). The end won’t come until God has given an opportunity for all the nations to hear the wonderful news about His merciful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are not to be worried about when the end will get here. We are to be about the Father's business until Jesus comes to "gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (24:31) Jesus made it clear to His followers that they wouldn't know when it would happen, but they would not miss His return. (see Mt 24:27-28). In fact, He said that no one knows, "not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son" (that's JESUS HIMSELF!!!). If God didn't tell Jesus the date when He walked the earth, He is not going to reveal it to you (or the Mayans!)

The only command we are given about the end times is found in vs 42 and it simply says to "be on the alert...be ready." If we are faithfully going about the Father's business every day, we will be ready, and we will be blessed and rewarded by our Master

Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

In Matthew 16:13-20 Jesus and His disciples are at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asks them a question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

The disciples respond with answers that they must have heard others say: "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets." Their answers revealed that people did acknowledge the unique and special nature of Jesus. Those that believed he was John the Baptist believed that he had come back from the dead, because John had already been executed by Herod. Those that believed he was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets believed the same, because those prophets had long since passed away. They also were saying that His teaching carried so much weight and wisdom that He must be inspired by God as a prophet.

But Jesus then asked His closest followers: "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered for them all: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God?" Jesus said that Peter's understanding came straight from heaven itself, straight from the heart of the Heavenly Father. Peter had gotten it—he understood the mystery of the ages—that God the Son was present with them. He was here to bring salvation to mankind.

Jesus continues to ask all men the same question today—and in the answer rides each man's eternal destination—"Who do you say that I am?"

What will your answer be?

In Christ,

Bro Stan