

Cross Shaped People

1. Intro – Is it worth it?

- Not long after Liana and I got married we traveled around Europe in an old motorhome
- At the time, we thought we had picked up a bargain
- Importantly it was tall enough for me to stand in without being on my knees and wide enough for me to sleep across without being in the fetal position 8hrs every night
- While functionally it might have been a ripper ... mechanically however, it was a lemon
 - We hadn't even left England before we had to call for road assistance for a flat battery and failing alternator ... and the problems continued to come at a regular rate of knots for the entire time we traveled
 - More road side assistance once we got to France
 - 2 days in a garage for a new timing belt
 - Flat bald tyres that couldn't be replaced because we had no jack and when we did borrow one the spare was flat too
 - New brakes and tyres all round
 - Problems with the gear box
 - A cracked diff that was welded up by a Greek mechanic
 - More alternators and starter motors you could poke a stick at
 - And to cap it off ... a blown engine in Germany that had to be replaced!!
- And you might well ask ... was it worth it??
 - Was it worth the hassle and the cost and the stress and ...
- Liana and I will tell you without a doubt ...YES!
 - We had the time of our life
 - The cost was definitely worth it ... the cost was nothing ... compared to the great joy we experienced on our trip

- In the passage we're looking at today, we may read Jesus words and the radical and all encompassing call he demands of those who follow him and say to ourselves ... "Wow!! Is it really worth it?"
- You'd be right to look at what Jesus has to say and realise that what he demands is costly
- But my prayer is that by the time we've finished looking at this passage we'll all be convinced that the cost of following Jesus is worth it ... because the reward he offers is priceless

2. Jesus call to the cross [v31-33]

- Last week we saw Peter and the disciples finally confess Jesus is the Christ
 - Spent last 2 or so years following Jesus
 - Heard his teaching > seen his miracles
 - Finally, Jesus opened their blind eyes to see that he is the Christ
- As we learnt last week ... they were like the blind man who Jesus miraculously opened his eyes to see ...
- But at this stage they don't fully understand what it means for Jesus to be the Christ > like the blind man ... they don't see clearly
- That's because they have a different expectation as to what the Christ will be like
 - They expected a king who would overthrow the Romans and restore Israel¹

- If the disciples had gone out at this point declaring Jesus was the Christ ... they would have been declaring the wrong Christ
 - So Jesus has to teach them what it means for him to be the Christ
 - Does that immediately in v31
 - *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*
 - He need to teach the disciples they have to abandon their idea of the Christ ... and understand that instead of conquest and power and greatness ... that as the Christ ... Jesus must suffer and die

- Notice Jesus says he **must** suffer and die > Two reasons for this
- Firstly ... as he will explain in 10:45 ... Jesus has come to die as a ransom for man
 - He must die in order to pay the ransom price for sin
 - Unless he dies, you and I ... and rest of the world would otherwise be left to face God's judgment for our sin on our own
 - If forgiveness for sin is to be made possible ... Jesus must die

- Second reason is because it is to fulfill the OT scriptures
 - The OT prophets foretold that the Christ would suffer

¹ *Psalms of Solomon, 17* – "Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them a king, the son of David ... and gird him with strength, that he might shatter unrighteous rulers, and purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction ... He shall have the heathen nations serve him under his yoke." and *Palestinian Targum, Genesis 49:10* – "How beautiful is the king, the Messiah, who will arise from those who are the house of Judah! He girds up his loins and goes forth and orders the battle array against his enemies and slays the kings along with their overlords, and no king or overlord can stand before him; he reddens the mountains with the blood of their slain, his clothing is dipped in blood like a winepress."

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- **Isaiah 53:3-5** ³ *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*
 - The disciples should have been clued into this
 - But they had failed to realise that God's Messiah / the Christ must suffer if he was going to bring salvation to God's people
 - The way God was going to save his people was by sending his own perfect son to die on behalf of sinful humanity – just as the OT prophets like Isaiah had predicted
 - It would be and could ONLY be ... Jesus death that could atone for sin
 - The punishment we deserve for sin would be borne by him ... as he died to pay the ransom price you and I should have paid
 - Now when Peter hears Jesus speaking openly about his death, he's shocked
 - And we see in v32 that Peter rebukes Jesus
 - He doesn't like the idea of Jesus dying ... because a rejected, humiliated and executed Christ just wasn't in line with Jewish hopes & convictions.
 - Peter was expecting glory and power and greatness and victory
 - Not suffering and humiliation and death!
 - The Christ, doesn't suffer the shame and humiliation and death of a criminal!
 - The Christ doesn't die! > What type of Christ is that!
 - So he takes Jesus aside to set him straight
 - *"Now Jesus ... what are you talking about mate? You're on a winning streak here*
 - *"You're the Christ ... > doing loads of miracles > the crowds love you >*
 - *"You've a bunch of keen guys here ... willing to go all the way with you to the top*
 - *"You're destined for greatness ... the road to glory is before you*
 - *"Let's stop with this rubbish about dying and start working out our strategy for Jerusalem*
 - Of course it's Satan's wish that Jesus wouldn't die ...
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- because if Jesus doesn't die, then God's anger at sin won't be extinguished and we'd all still be culpable before God
- So Satan ... working through Peter ... tries to tempt Jesus to accept this role as a triumphant king ... rather than the suffering Christ
- But Jesus utterly rejects it ... because he knows the only way to the KOG is through suffering and death
- And so in v33 Jesus responds by rebuking Peter
 - *"Get behind me, Satan!" ... "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*
- God's plan and purpose is that as the Christ, Jesus MUST suffer and die
 - Without it ... there would be no salvation for God's people
 - Without there would be no salvation for you and I
- **Application**
- Jesus mission is shaped by the cross
 - And our understanding of Jesus must also be shaped by the cross
 - This is what it means for Jesus to be the Christ
 - We misunderstand who Jesus is and what he came to do
- He's not
 - NRMA Jesus
 - Piñata Jesus
 - Moral Jesus
- He's the 'promised rescuing king who dies for your sin' Jesus

3. Jesus call to follow him [v34]

- Once Jesus has made it clear that he's the Christ who must die, he then begins to lay down what it means to follow him?
 - What does it mean to be a disciple of this Christ?
- **Illustration – Following on Twitter**
- The recent phenomenon of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has dramatically changed social communication and networking
 - The big shift is being able to instantly know what is happening in the lives of all the people you are friends with or follow
 - All you have to do log in ... find the friend or celebrity you're interested in ... and click 'follow' and you'll automatically start receiving all their photos, status updates, messages, pokes and tweets

- You'll know exactly where they are > what they're doing > who they're with and they're be a photo to prove it
 - You can follow anyone ... Justin Beiber > Lady Gaga > Barak Obama > Dalai Lama

- JB has 35 mil followers
- But what does JB expect of his 35 mil followers?
 - Nothing!
 - They can follow his every move > see where he's performing > what pearls of wisdom he has for all his fans
 - But they're completely passive > they don't have to do anything

- In complete contrast ... Jesus says in v34 *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."*
- Here Jesus says ...
 - If you want to follow me ...
 - if you want to be part of God's kingdom ...
 - if you want to enjoy the benefits of the ransom price I'm going to pay ...
 - then you **must** deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me'

- **Deny yourself**
- Being a disciple of Jesus means you must deny yourself
 - Life is no longer centered around your whims and desires ... instead you start living life with Jesus at the centre
 - We shift from doing our will to doing God's will
 - He dictates the drum beat of life that we march to ... not us.

- **Take up your cross**
- If that's not radical enough, Jesus also says in v34 ... *you must take up your cross*
 - This has nothing to do with the little burdens of life we experience
 - You might hear people say ... 'we all have our cross to bear!'
 - Maybe because they have an elderly parent they're looking after

- But this is not what Jesus is talking about and it's not what the disciples and the crowd would have understood Jesus to mean either
 - In that time the image of someone taking up their cross ... is the image of a condemned man carrying his own cross beam to his crucifixion ... just as Jesus would soon do as part of his mission

- Jesus means that in following him we must go through a death like experience as we hand over our life to him
 - In following Jesus, we effectively die to self

- **Illustration – Jason Bourne**
- I love the Bourne movies with Matt Damon
- In the last movie there's this flash back to the time when Jason Bourne is first recruited into his role as an assassin for CIA
- As he finally commits himself to the programme and this new life as a CIA agent and agrees to let the CIA direct his new life ... he hands over his dog tags and he is given his new name
- His old self is as good as dead ... he becomes a new man

- Being a disciple of Jesus means you die to self

- **Follow Jesus**
- Finally disciples of Jesus are to follow him
 - We must have the same attitude to the will and word of God that Jesus has
 - The pattern of Jesus life ... is to be the pattern for his disciples

- You see ... following Jesus far passive > it's not like following JB on Twitter
 - Following Jesus is full on > active > boots and all
 - And Jesus lays in on the line right from the start

- **Application**
- First thing to note here is that if we going to be a disciple ... Jesus says we MUST do this
 - Not saying that you're saved because you do these things
 - No > saved only by Jesus death as a ransom for your life
 - But if we're to share in the benefits of Jesus death ... we must follow Jesus whole heartedly ... living for him and his kingdom

- When you become a Christian ... you don't get the option to tick the box on this
 - Not like buying a car or computer where you tick boxes for the optional extras you want
 - "Congratulations > you've become a Christian
 - "Please tick the box for the options you would like
 - "deny yourself, take your cross and follow me"

- “Mmmm ... no thanks”
- No! That’s box is automatically ticked for you
- You want to be my disciple says Jesus ... you “MUST deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me”

- On a practical level ... denying yourself and taking up your cross means a fundamental change in thinking ... in the way you think and act with your life
 - Finances
 - Sexual desires
 - How you use your time
 - Your attitude to work / school
 - Ambitions
- When you’re following him ... then every aspect of our life must be handed over to him
 - We can’t go through life singing with Frank Sinatra ... ‘I did it my way’ ... because Jesus demands we do it all his way

- We start to get a picture here that following Jesus is no half hearted measure – is it?
 - We can’t sit on the fence ... either we are with him or against him
 - We can’t be detached
 - We can’t stand at a distance ... and yet claim allegiance to Jesus
 - We can’t be happy accept Jesus as our saviour ... but not also make him our Lord ... he must be both

- **Illustration – Blondin**
- Charles Blondin was a Frenchman who in the 1850-60’s amazed crowds with his high wire trapeze acts
- Famous for tight rope walking across Niagara Falls
 - Apparently he did it many times - blindfold, on stilts, sitting down midway while he cooked and ate an omelette
- At one stage he asked the crowd if they thought he could carry a man across the wire in a wheelbarrow
 - And a reporter said ‘I really believe you can do it ... you’re the greatest stunt artist of all time’
 - Blondin said ‘Well then, you get it wheel barrow’

- You see, Jesus doesn’t just want us to mentally affirm he is the Christ
 - “Oh yeah yeah ... Jesus was a real man of history

- "Oh yeah yeah ... he died on a cross for my sin
- He wants us to get it the wheelbarrow with him and entrust our lives to him

- That's radical stuff isn't it?
- Handing over the reins of our life to someone else in a world that says
 - look after no.1 ...
 - you've gotta do what you've gotta do ...
 - it's all about you
- Our society says it's all about self
 - Jesus says > deny yourself
- That's radical!

4. Jesus call to obey him [v35-38]

- Now a rational person would look at v34 and say ...
 - Why would I do that?
 - Why would I deny myself > why would I die to self?
- Jesus anticipates this type of question in v35-38
- Here he gives the crowd three compelling reasons why it's a cost worth bearing

- ***You will save your life***
- v35 ... *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

- Jesus is saying ...
 - if you want to preserve the life you live here and now ...
 - if you want to continue being boss of your own life now ...
 - that's fine ...
 - but it will also come at a cost > you will forfeit your life
- Our sin and our continual rejection of Jesus as the Christ will mean we will be cut off from God and his eternal kingdom

- By choosing to rule our own life ... it might seem appealing for the here and now ... but the cost is enormous
- The person who makes such a choice has lost REAL life ... for they will never share in eternal salvation offered by God

- On the other hand, the person who gives up their life ... who denies themselves ... takes up their cross to follow Jesus then ...

- any loss they may experience in this life is insignificant because they will receive real life > life to the full in God's eternal kingdom
- **Your life has eternal value**
- Secondly we see in v36-37 ... *'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his life? Or what can a man give in exchange for his life?'*
- Jesus is saying here ...
 - there's no use gaining the world, if we forfeit our life in God's eternal kingdom
 - and there is nothing we can give to buy it back
- When the time comes for us to face our maker ... and we sit down before him on that great day of judgment ... we won't be able to bargain or trade with him anything we might have gained in this life ... for our eternal life
- **Illustration– Roger Federer**
- Take someone like Roger Federer ... who it would seem has literally gained all there is to gain the world
 - He's won 16 grand slam titles
 - Last year he earned \$7.7m in prize money
 - Over the course of his career he's earned over \$290m in prize money and endorsements
 - He's an amazing athlete with the looks and charisma that make him a sponsors dream!
- But even everything Federer has achieved in life ... and the wealth he's accumulated ... is not as valuable as the offer of eternal life that God has given us through Jesus
- We can gain the WHOLE WORLD, Jesus says ... and it's worth **nothing** compared to the riches of having eternal life
- When you do the cost / benefit analysis ... it's a no brainer
- We might gain
 - Possessions > comfort > material security > success > recognition from others > status > lifestyle we want ...
 - But when you forfeit eternal life ... you've lost everything ... you're eternally bankrupt
- Jesus says eternal life is what is of true value

- **Welcomed into God's kingdom**

- Third reason gives is there in v38 ... *If anyone is ashamed of Jesus & his words, Jesus will be ashamed of them when he comes back in glory as judge*
- Here Jesus makes it clear that
 - even though he will be despised and rejected and be killed ...
 - even though he'll undergo the shame of the cross ...
 - there'll be a time when he will return in glory
- As the risen Christ, who rules over the heavens and the earth, the Bible tells us he will come back as judge
- And the warning to the crowd ... and to us ... is that those who are ashamed of Jesus now ... he will be ashamed of them then
- If we fail to acknowledge Jesus now ... he will fail to acknowledge us before the Father when he returns in his glory & majesty

- **Application**

- Jesus warning is to those who are more concerned with
 - fitting into this world
 - pleasing those around them
 - worried about their reputation or friendships or popularity if they follow Jesus ... rather than living for, following and pleasing him
- He's warning us that we don't have a second chance once we die
 - We won't be able to change our minds when he returns
 - We have our chance now ... after that ... the dye's been cast

- **Illustration**

- Like going to Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane to watch the State of Origin, dressed in a NSW jumper
- Declaring up front your allegiance to the Blues and barracking for them the whole game
- And then when Qld wins, trying to say you were a Qld supporter all along so you can go and party with the Qld supporters and share in their victory!
- But it will be too late!
- They won't have a bar of it and you wouldn't be accepted
- In the same way, those who are ashamed of Jesus ... will have no part of his eternal kingdom > they won't receive the gift of eternal life

5. Conclusion

- **Shackleton Quote**

- Ernest Shackleton was one of the great Antarctic explorers of the early 1900's
- In 1914, he famously led an expedition in an attempt to cross the Antarctic continent on foot
- In recruiting men for the journey he apparently posted this advertisement:
 - "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success."
 - Apparently, 5,000 turned up in response to the advert!²
- Like Shackleton, Jesus doesn't promise us a life of health, wealth and happiness if we follow him
 - There'll be a cost > there'll be hazards
 - But boy is it worth it
 - Freed from sin and it's penalty of judgment
 - Real life now and forever
 - Peace with God
 - Welcomed into the KoG
 - You can't put a price on those things ... they're priceless
- But unlike Shackleton's men, our situation is very different ...
- You see our safe return will in no way be doubtful ... it's guaranteed ... because our Lord ... is also our Saviour
- The death he died has ensured we will be honoured ... we will be welcomed into God's kingdom on that last day
- Jesus death on cross in our place means there's absolutely no doubt about our reward
 - He's made sure of that already
- Which means following Jesus, denying ourselves, taking up our cross to follow Jesus ... is definitely worth it
- So will you follow Jesus?
- Will you deny yourself to live instead for Jesus
- Will you value eternal life over the things of this life
- Will you confess Jesus as Lord now, so you won't be lost when he comes again

² <http://www.antarctic-circle.org/advert.htm>

- I pray that you will ... because it's worth it!

PRAY