

Radical Sacrifice

Big idea: Following Jesus requires radical sacrifice – radical service & radical surgery

1. Radical sacrifice

- It's remarkable the things ppl are willing to sacrifice to achieve something in life that they truly believe in ... or something they're whole-heartedly want to achieve?
- For example ... look at what elite sports men & women sacrifice in order to compete at the Olympics
- Training for 6-7hrs a day ... for four or more years ... for the one big event
- They sacrifice so much ...
 - can't go out late, coz gotta get up in the morning to go to training
 - can't drink alcohol coz it will affect their training (except our men's relay!)
 - can't have a girl/boyfriend coz they haven't got time because of all their training
- They basically sacrifice their entire life as they chase the dream of competing at the Olympics and winning a gold medal
- They sacrifice everything ... for the chance of being the greatest

- Same could be said of people seeking to
 - Climb the corporate ladder
 - Run their own business
- It's remarkable the things ppl are willing to sacrifice to for the things they want

- And it's a stark contrast isn't it between
 - the medal and fame that an Olympian might win ...
 - the promotion or business success we might achieve in the work place
 - And the gift of eternal life that comes to those whose trust is in Jesus

- As great as a gold medal winner may be – like Sally Pearson or Grant Hackett or Cathy Freeman ... their moment is only fleeting isn't it?
- The newspapers that declare their greatness today ... will be fish and chip wrapper tomorrow ... and they'll soon be forgotten only to be replaced by the next great champion

- Yet for those whose trust is in Jesus, the prize on offer will last much longer than the brief fame of an Olympian ... it's a prize that lasts forever
- And if an Olympian's prepared to sacrifice their life as they train 6-7hrs a day every day, year after year for something that isn't even guaranteed and is only fleeting ... then what are you prepared to sacrifice for the prize that is guaranteed and will last forever?

- In Mark 9 that we're looking at this morning, Jesus begins to outline the type of sacrifice he expects from his followers
- And just like an athlete is willing to radically sacrifice their lives to follow their dreams and aspirations of victory ... Jesus demands radical sacrifice from his disciples who follow him
 - To be a disciple of Jesus requires radical service and radical surgery

- The question for us is ...
 - Are we prepared to show the sacrifice that Jesus wants us to ... more than the other things in life we are willing to sacrifice
 - Are we prepared to follow him on his terms ... or are we trying to take short cuts and follow him on our terms?

2. Following Jesus requires radical service [v30-37]

- Jesus and the disciples have started heading south from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum ... on his way to Jerusalem where he knows he'll die
- This is the beginning of his death march ... and on the way, Jesus is teaching his disciples about his impending death and what it means to be a disciple who follows him

- In v31 he predicts his upcoming death for a second time¹
- And in v32 we see that the disciples still don't understand > like the blind man Ch 8 ... disciples don't yet see clearly
- They know he's the Christ, but they don't understand that he has to die
- They want to follow Jesus and be his disciples ... but they don't understand they it requires sacrifice, service and humility
- In v33-34, it becomes even clearer that the disciples didn't understand all this, because on the way they'd been arguing about who was the greatest among them
- Whether it was the pride of some of the disciples who were closest to Jesus² or the jealousy of the others, we don't know

¹ C.f. Mark 8:31

² Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33

- Sadly, if they'd understood
 - what was about to happen to Jesus
 - what is required of disciples who follow him
 - they would've had other things on their mind
- But they were being men typical of their culture [and ours] where power, authority & status were highly valued and sought after
- Jesus knows what they were arguing about, and he wants to expose their attitude and set them straight
- In v35 Jesus says
 - 'If you want to be great my kingdom ... then you have to be last and servant of all'
 - 'If you want to be great my kingdom ... then you have to be the least'
 - 'If you want to a disciple of the King of heaven ... then greatness is not measured like it is here on earth'
 - 'Greatness is demonstrated by those who serve ... who live and act in humility ... so put others first'
- Here Jesus is starting to put some meat on the bones about what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross that he was speaking about earlier in 8:34
 - If you want to great in my books ...
 - If you want to understand the way I view greatness ...
 - then be a servant to all
- Following Jesus is not about greatness and glory
 - It's about sacrifice, service and humility
- This is very radical stuff
- In Jesus day, the person who serves or waits on others was regarded as inferior, subordinate and lowly in status
 - It was not a position to seek after or covet
 - Kids in Palestine didn't grow up saying to their friends
 - "When I grow up ... you know what ... I'm going to be a servant!"
 - The servant was the least of all in society ... and still is in many places
- But what Jesus is saying is that in God's Kingdom ...
 - the one who serves ... is actually the greatest
 - the one who the world considers to be last ... is actually first

- **Illustration**

- Perhaps to serve some one powerful or great would have some degree of greatness ...
 - like being a Presidential Aide or
 - celebrity body guard or
 - Prime Ministers Chef ...
 - that might be cool and honourable
- But Jesus is saying that we should be the very last and servant of **ALL**
 - Not just serve the people we think are powerful or influential or famous
- But being a true servant ... means serving the least powerful and influential as well

- This is the complete reverse of the disciples' ... as well as our own society's understanding of greatness, isn't it!?

- **Illustration**

- And to show what he means by all of this ... Jesus makes his point in a very shocking way by taking a child into his arms and welcoming him
- Children had no social status in first century Palestine
 - They were at the bottom of the social ladder
 - Children had no rights and were no better off than servants
 - They certainly had no place in a formal teaching seminar that Jesus was conducting here with his disciples

- Yet Jesus chooses to embrace a child in the middle of his teaching
 - In doing so ... Jesus is acting out what he meant by being a servant
 - He wants his disciples to know that this is the kind of self humbling which is required of disciples who follow him
 - True disciples will be prepared to serve the 'nobodies' of this world because they're unconcerned about their own status

- You want to be my disciple says Jesus
- You want to enter the KOG ...
 - Then you must be willing to humble yourself and be a servant, and that means
 - serving the least powerful > the least influential > the least important ... as Jesus did with the child
- As we serve like this ... serve with this attitude and mindset ... then we are showing we are truly welcoming of Jesus

- Of course Jesus would go on to show us the ultimate act of service as he went to the cross
 - Mark 10:45 ... *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*
- On the cross Jesus did become the servant of ALL ...
 - of ALL humanity ...
 - of ALL sinners ...
 - including all those people that we would consider the very least in our world
- The King of God's kingdom would become The Servant King

- **Application**
- Now this is very counter cultural ... it's against the human ideal to serve others
- Our natural inclination is to
 - promote our successes and
 - remind people of our achievements and
 - use our power for our own gain
- And sadly when we live with this mindset ... it invariably results in us displeasing God and hurting others

- Let me explain ...
- As we seek after greatness (like the disciples were) we often become self serving & proud
- And what happens when we are like this?
 - We don't treat people like we should
 - At work > if we seek greatness through promotions or recognition of our work
 - we'll find fault in our colleagues
 - whinge about others to our peers and boss
 - we'll make decisions that are suit ourselves but cost others ...
 - we'll speak down to others ... not treating them as equals

- But what about closer to home ... in our relationships with our spouse or kids ...
 - When we we're seeking to be the 'great one' in
 - we get lazy > letting our spouse do the yucky jobs
 - we get impatient with our spouse > not showing grace
 - we speak with contempt
 - we're too proud to say sorry

- Often our self seeking greatness leads to hurting others
- But most significantly ... as we seek after greatness by worldly standards we become proud and forget about who we really are before God
- We forget
 - that we're sinful ...
 - that we need forgiveness and
 - any blessing we enjoy is a gift from him ... especially the gift of eternal life
- When we remember how Jesus "*did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*"... then we can't be anything but humble ...
 - Self seeking greatness just isn't the right response to the humility and self sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to deal with your sins
 - It's just incompatible ... that a disciple of the one who died as the suffering servant would seek after greatness and glory
 - That we'd act in exactly the opposite manner of the one we claim to follow
 - It's just incompatible ... that disciples of the one who humbled himself to death, even death on a cross ... we could be anything but humble and servant hearted ourselves
- So instead of being proud and self-serving ... our attitude and mindset should be servant-hearted humility
 - Being willing to put others and their needs first before our own
 - Not saying you have to be a door mat and let people walk over you ... but taking the lead and humbly, selflessly, serving others
- Radical service ... means we are willing to ...
 - doing the unattractive jobs around the home, work place, church
 - putting your spouse's feelings before your own when their upset
 - giving our kids the attention they need and deserve rather than doing the thing we want to do
 - speaking to & befriending the person who's hard to talk to ... or socially awkward ... not part of anyone's network
 - not sitting in your usual seat so you can welcome a new person who comes to church
 - giving up your time to help the person in need

- So Jesus says when it comes to measuring 'greatness' according to God's standards, ...
 - Don't be proud ... be humble
 - Don't be selfish ... be selfless
 - Don't serve yourself ... serve others
- This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus ... the one who modeled humility and servant heartedness for our sake on the cross

3. Following Jesus requires radical surgery [v42-48]

- In v42-50 ... Jesus gives another aspect of what it means to follow him as the Christ
- He says in this section ... if you want to be my disciple ... then not only is radical service required, but radical **surgery** is required also
- As he often does, Jesus uses hyperbole to make his point
- That is ... he makes a very extreme statement to help us understand

- And so we see him saying ...
 - If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off
 - If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off
 - If your eye causes you to sin, gauge it out
- It's better, Jesus says, to enter life with me and God's eternal kingdom without these things ... than to keep them and be thrown into the fires of hell

- Pretty graphic isn't it? ... But his point is clear ...
 - Sin is that serious ... and we need to take it that seriously
 - Continual ... unrepentant sin shows our contempt for God and that our allegiance is not with Jesus
 - Live a life like that Jesus says and you have one certain future ... Hell
- And Jesus makes it pretty clear that Hell is not a nice place to be³
 - The quotation he cites in v48 from the OT prophet Isaiah makes that pretty plain
- And so he graciously warns us that Hell is not a place we want to be hanging out in forever

³ v48 Cites Isaiah 66:24 – view of those 'who have rebelled against me'

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- When Jesus says ... if you want to be my disciple you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me
 - That doesn't mean
 - we're to take sin lightly ... or
 - we can go on sinning as we please
 - To swan through life claiming to follow Jesus and not take sin seriously is just hypocrisy ... and we know Jesus condemned those who were hypocrites⁴
 - To not takes sin seriously shows
 - we don't fully understand how much sin is a stench in the nostrils of God
 - we don't fully appreciate the significance of the cross

 - And so Jesus says, whatever causes you to sin ... get rid of it!!
 - Take drastic action!
 - Cut it off from your life ...
 - because it is better for you to have a mutilated body in heaven, than a whole body and be cast into hell
 - So be ruthless > cut it off! > don't leave anything to chance that might ensnare you

 - **Illustration**
 - When I was a young and playing rugby, the culture was to play hard and party hard
 - Start drinking at the club house until the presentations and speeches were over and then we'd all head into town, find a pub or a club and continue the partying > getting drunk > being obnoxious > flirting with girls
 - But when I became a Christian ... I realized I had to stop living that way
 - So I just had to cut it off > I had to sever it ... so I wouldn't be drawn into the inevitable sin that late night partying led to
 - So I'd go back to the club > have a few beers with the boys > presentations would finish and when it came time for everyone to head into town ... I'd say good night and head home
 - It cost me some friendships ... but Jesus would say better to enter heaven with one or two less friends ... than to have all the mates in the world and be cast into Hell

 - **Application**

⁴ Refer - Matt 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51; Mk. 7:6; Lk. 6:42; 12:56; 13:15

- For me at that stage of life it was drinking & partying ... now it's different things I need to sever and prune
- For the disciples, it was their pride ... as they argued over who was the greatest, that needed to be cut off
- But friends ... what about you ... what things are causing you to sin?
- What things are distracting you from following Jesus?
- Where do you need to take the scalpel to your life and cut these things off?

- Is your ambition causing you to put your career before Jesus?
 - Get radical cut it off
 - Stop taking jobs that mean you can't serve God first
 - If you're in a job that doesn't give you the time to serve as you should, ... get out of, take a demotion ... that's the radical and urgent action Jesus is urging us to here

- Is the temptation of internet pornography a vice for you?
- Get rid of it, cut it off
 - Put filters on your computer that prevent access to this stuff
 - Set up warning emails that go to a friend when you do try and access it
 - Don't be on the internet late at night

- Do you need to take the scalpel to your drinking habits
 - Not that alcohol in itself is a problem ... but when you drink it, does it lead you into sin?
 - If that's true for you, then cut it off > take radical action
 - Don't put yourself in positions where this will be a problem for you

- If you have friends that lead you astray and cause you to sin
 - Then be careful about what situations you put yourself in with them
 - If necessary, redefine the boundaries of what you do with that friend

- Whatever it is that causes you to sin ... get rid of it Jesus says ... take immediate, radical action.
 - He doesn't say 'if your hand causes you to sin, cut off a finger' ... he says get rid of the lot
 - So don't dabble with your temptations ... don't test yourself and see how far you can go without falling into sin ...
 - That's just foolish and asking for trouble and fails to take sin seriously
 - Flee from sin ... do it urgently > root it out of your life

4. Conclusion

- Remember ... Jesus is on his way to the cross where he is going to suffer and die as a ransom for the sins of many
 - His death would be the ultimate sacrifice
 - And he wants his disciples to understand that to follow him means sacrifice too
 - He needs to turn their understanding upside down about what it means to be a disciple
 - It's not all about glory and greatness
- Discipleship means
 - Radical service
 - Radical surgery
- Being a disciple of Jesus means willing to humble ourselves and serve others
 - A life characterized by sacrifice, humility and service
- Being a disciple of Jesus means understanding that God takes sin seriously and he wants us to take it seriously
- While the sacrifice is radical ...
 - we need to remember that Jesus has won for us the most wonderful prize that is far better than any gold medal or fleeting moment of greatness or pleasure in this world
 - It's a prize he's won on our behalf and he freely gives to those who follow him ... guaranteed
- But like the athlete sacrificing their life to win a medal ... following Jesus doesn't come without cost
 - He calls for radical service and radical change
 - Are you fully on board with Jesus demands?
 - Are you prepared to following him on his terms?
- **PRAY**
- **Questions**
- Causing others to sin ... especially those who are apparently the 'least' of believers will bring serious judgement

- v49-50: Following J: Living as sacrifices
- v49 Salted with fire
 - Salt added to sacrifices in OT⁵
 - Believers lives are to be sacrifices to God, suffering / purifying ourselves now we will not come under God's judgement later
 - Salt metaphor points to how the life lived as a disciple is one of a sacrifice to God
 - Like an OT sacrifice that was seasoned with salt, so too our life is to be seasoned with salt as we sacrifice our life to honouring and serving the Lord
- v50 lose saltiness
 - Dead sea salt could lose it's saltiness
 - Salt is the distinctiveness of the believer, to lose distinctiveness is to be of no use for the KoG
- 50b – Summary of the section
 - be distinctive, be servant of others

⁵ Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24; Ex 30:35. See also Rom 12:1-2