

Follow the Crucified Christ

Today we will be continuing our theme, ***Mission Impossible***, with the most crucial of all the talks to date. Our theme this morning is ***'Following the Crucified Christ'*** probably the pivotal theme in our entire series. It is not the most comfortable theme for any preacher or any congregation to receive. Our approach to and our acceptance of this theme, will bring about either the most fundamental change or our greatest rejection of the Christian faith.

Many people love to wear a cross as a piece of jewellery. To either embrace the cross or to be embraced by the cross, is to die. The wearing of the expensive, beautiful piece of jewellery, signifies that the person has accepted Jesus Christ as both the Saviour and Lord of his/her life. It is a public statement that the person has died to his/her desire for a comfortable life and has opted instead to be counted as dead to sin but alive to the desires of Christ. To be embraced by the cross of Jesus is a total life changing event which will involve a complete reshaping of your way of thinking.

It has been rumoured that many a bride, when walking down the aisle, is saying to herself, 'I'll change him!' I know, its just a rumour. But many marriages go through some very difficult times when the couple realises that neither of them is going to change the other partner. The most difficult person to change, in all of history, is the husband.

The fear of total surrender, total commitment, robs many married couples of the greatest adventure in this life. 'Till death us do part' marks the most exciting and exclusive words which opens the couple to an intimate opportunity of becoming one with another totally different person. Men shy away from this by making excuses like, "I'm not the emotional type person." Or, 'Hey I told you on the day we married that I love you, if anything changes, I'll let you know – so what's for supper, babe?'"

In very much the same way, many people fail to see that the surrendering of your life to Jesus is the start of the greatest adventure a

person could ever embark on – the surprises and hardships will leave you breathless with excitement. You want to know what grabbed my attention? Seeing the first miracle Jesus did in answer to my extremely faithless, hesitant prayer. He multiplied the very limited food we had to feed the abundant number of teenagers on a camp, when we were far away from any stores.

There is one thing which I need to debunk – following Jesus is not the pathway to a trouble-free, get all you want, get rich quick lifestyle. He promised that in this life we will have trouble, but He also promised that He is the Ruler, the Lord of life. Some encouraging news, a spoiler alert: all but one of the original disciples were martyred because of their total commitment to the resurrected Christ. So, I could have entitled this sermon, ‘Come to Jesus and you will DIE!’ I must hasten to add, to clarify, unless you come to Jesus, you will indeed Die, forever! ***For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*** Mark 8:35-36 (NIV).

Following the Crucified Christ is the most exciting adventure on which anyone could ever embark. Our desire for a comfortable Christianity is not only an anathema to Jesus, it is also the most self-centred, boring and most unrewarding lifestyle, ever!

I know you love to hear a story? Right?! Straight from the Bible and read by two of our most accomplished and eloquent readers.

Let's turn to Exodus 3:1 – 4:17

Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the west end of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of GOD appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

GOD saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

He said, "Yes? I'm right here!"

God said, "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

GOD said, "I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I've seen for myself how cruelly they're being treated by the Egyptians. It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

Moses answered God, "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

"I'll be with you, and this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you: When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."

"Suppose I go to the People of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What do I tell them?"

"I-AM-WHO-I-AM. Tell the People of Israel, 'I-AM sent me to you.' This is what you're to say to the Israelites: 'GOD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob sent me to you.' This has always been my name, and this is how I always will be known. "Now be on your way. Gather the leaders of Israel. Tell them, 'GOD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I've looked into what's being done to you in Egypt, and I've determined to get you out of the affliction of Egypt and take you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the

Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, a land brimming over with milk and honey." ' "Believe me, they will listen to you. Then you and the leaders of Israel will go to the king of Egypt and say to him: 'GOD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness where we will worship GOD—our God.' "I know that the king of Egypt won't let you go unless forced to, so I'll intervene and hit Egypt where it hurts—oh, my miracles will send them reeling!—after which they'll be glad to send you off.

"They won't trust me. They won't listen to a word I say. They're going to say, 'GOD? Appear to him? Hardly!' "

"What's that in your hand?"

"A staff."

"Throw it on the ground."

He threw it. It became a snake; Moses jumped back—fast! GOD said to Moses, "Reach out and grab it by the tail."

He reached out and grabbed it—and he was holding his staff again.

"That's so they will trust that GOD appeared to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

"Put your hand inside your shirt."

He slipped his hand under his shirt, then took it out. His hand had turned leprous, like snow. He said, "Put your hand back under your shirt."

He did it, then took it back out—as healthy as before.

"So if they don't trust you and aren't convinced by the first sign, the second sign should do it. But if it doesn't, if even after these two signs they don't trust you and listen to your message, take some water out of the Nile and pour it out on the dry land; the Nile water that you pour out will turn to blood when it hits the ground."

"Master, please, I don't talk well. I've never been good with words, neither before nor after you spoke to me. I stutter and stammer."

"And who do you think made the human mouth? And who makes some mute, some deaf, some sighted, some blind? Isn't it I, GOD? So,

get going. I'll be right there with you—with your mouth! I'll be right there to teach you what to say."

"Oh, Master, please! Send somebody else!"

GOD got angry with Moses: Don't you have a brother, Aaron the Levite? He's good with words, I know he is. He speaks very well. I'll be right there with you as you speak and with him as he speaks, teaching you step by step. He will speak to the people for you. He'll act as your mouth, but you'll decide what comes out of it. Now take this staff in your hand; you'll use it to do the signs." (Exodus 3:1- 4:17 MSG)

There are 3 main things which I believe we need to consider

Why Did God encounter Moses

What was Moses' response

Our response

1. Why Did God encounter Moses

- **Moses had become a selfish, self-centred person**

Moses had spent the last 40 years in the backyard of "Nowhere Ville". An 80-year-old man looking after sheep. But God had other ideas. He was basically running away from both God and man – he was self-centred. He certainly was not interested in what either God wanted or what man needed. He was definitely set in his way and in his way of thinking.

- **Moses needed to have his hard drive reset**

The very first thing God had to change in Moses was his perception of who God is. It is the very first thing God needs to change in our lives. He needed an insight into God's heart. He needed to see the character of God. God is love. He needed to stop running away from God and people

- **Here's a thought: God without man is not God – Man without God is nothing**

God has chosen to do nothing without involving man – co-labouring with God. That is why God created man. God had to change Moses' perception that God is uninvolved, uninterested.

That's a major change in Moses' thinking. ***God actually wants to use me.*** I've been running away from God no reason whatsoever!

- **Moses needed to know that God is alive: *I Am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.***

I am the God of the living, not the dead. Now you can that in many different ways. There is no death in God presence. Moses without God was dead, he was a deadbeat, a no-body, the walking dead. Some people today, maybe in this church, you are merely living. No direction, no purpose, no significance. Just breathing.

- **Moses needed to see the world through God's lenses.**

Moses needed to see that there are people out there who need to hear this good news. Notice the words of God. ***"I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain***

- **Moses needed to hear the promises of God: *I will be with you***

No matter what God is calling you to do or be, I will be with you. I am the involved God of the present. This was something Andrew repeatedly said to Helen when he visited her. She had so many questions to which Andrew repeatedly answered, ***'God said, I will be with you.'***

- **Moses had to encounter God's power : *I am the all sufficient One***

I will deliver my people and ***'no thing'*** is going to be too difficult for me to accomplish (through you.) There is no god greater or more powerful than Me – even all the 'so called' gods of Egypt. Moses, My will cannot be thwarted. This was something which Moses had to learn. This is a major mind change which is needed in all us believers. Remember when Jesus said to his disciples, ***'Let's go over to the other side of the lake?'*** He then

fell asleep in the boat. His declared will had been pronounced. Nothing was going to prevent this from happening – not even the huge storm that erupted midway on their journey. This is why Jesus could fall asleep. ***Can you sleep though the storms in your life?***

"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"
(Mark 4:40 NIV)

This was a bit of a hard word to his disciples. I think it is a word from Jesus to me. ***"Christianity is not my responsibility, but my response to His ability."***

- In the words of a scripture we all know so well: ***With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.***

(Romans 12:1-2 Phillips NT)

2. ***What was Moses' response***

Moses was full of excuses -5 excuses in all.

Each of these excuses were answered gently by God – well, until the last one, that is. God nearly lost it there! How many times have we made a similar response to the call of God in our lives. ***"Lord, send someone else."*** Even folk sitting in our church today who are responding in the same way. Listen to those excuses, which we also use, but note the underlying lack of faith in the character of God.

Each of Moses' excuses can be summed up as

- ***I have more faith in my own inability***
- ***I don't believe you God have any ability***

CONCLUSION

Following the Crucified Christ can be measured and assessed

I want us to look at a very familiar parable of Jesus in Matthew 13. It is the one about the four different kinds of soil Jesus uses two different words which can become the litmus test for us. ***To hear and understand.*** Initially, his disciples did not understand. They asked him to explain it to them. So in verse 19, Jesus says some people are like the hard soil. They hear the message about the Kingdom of God but fail to understand the import. ***We could be just like Moses, making all sorts of excuses, all while attending church services.*** The hope is that somehow, by the grace of the Holy Spirit moving in our hearts, that hard soil will soften. That is my constant prayer. It's the meaning of the cry, ***"Come Holy Spirit!"***

On the other hand, in verse 23 he speaks about the person whose life is like the good soil, they ***hear and understand the message of the kingdom of God*** (which is God's reign in our lives,) and they produce a harvest, 30, 60 or 100fold what was sown into their lives. Jesus states that is by our fruit that we shall be known as followers of the crucified Christ

Following the crucified Christ produces a changed life. ***This is the evidence of hearing and understanding the gospel.***

MINISTRY TIME