

June 22, 2008
Pentecost 6

"Pointing to Jesus as the Source of Salvation Whatever the Cost"

MATTHEW 10:34-42

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' ³⁷ "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

As I speak here this morning some residents of Cedar Rapids, Iowa have a terrible mess on their hands. They are trying to clean up homes inundated by the dirty waters of the Cedar River. Brown mud, human and animal waste, fuel oil, and run off from farm fields have created a foul smelling brew dangerous to human health. To reclaim their homes they will have to get out the mud, tear out the dry wall and the carpets and whatever else was soaked by the flood waters. They will have to bleach the framing in the house to keep dangerous molds from forming. In time the homes will be cleaned up and restored. A year from now people will move back into homes with freshly painted walls, new carpeting, and cabinets. You will hardly notice that the house had once been flooded.

A far greater and more dangerous flood has enveloped the whole human race. Spewing forth from Adam and Eve came a toxic and noxious brew of sin that has entered the all human race. Every baby born into this world has a sinful nature that cannot wait to turn out evil of every kind that makes it unacceptable to God. There is a huge problem with this sin, this terrible pollution of sin. No bleach in the world can get rid of it, nor are there other super cleansing agents that get remove the stain. Good deeds cannot counteract and remove the condemnation that comes with sin. There is only cure and that is Jesus. He is the only source of peace and forgiveness with God. Sadly, we are all born into this world hating this plan that our God has developed to rescue us. I cannot image how the people of Iowa could reject free help from the government, but I do not that human beings will do everything they can to discredit and down play and despise the perfect solution for sin that Jesus provides.

In the words just read to you our Lord Jesus calls on Christians off every age to do whatever they can to hold him up to the world as the only source of salvation even if these means a huge battle against evil. This morning we want to speak to you about, **"Pointing to Jesus as the Only Source of Salvation Whatever the Cost."**

The battle with friends and family

It has been said that it cost you nothing to become a Christian but it will cost you everything to be a Christian. It may even cost you rejection and anger from your own family and friends. "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, daughter in law against her mother in law- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

If you travel to a Muslim country and begin telling them about Jesus you may find yourself rejected, hated and even thrown into prison for publicly expressing your faith in Jesus as your Lord and God and the only way to salvation. I recall a former Muslim who told me with bitterness and anger in his voice, "I will have nothing to do with a religion that has Jesus turning to a dying thief and offering him Paradise without demanding he do something to pay for his sins." If a son or daughter or other members of your family hate and despise the name of Jesus, they will not welcome your words that encourage them to put their hope in Jesus as the only source of complete pardon and cleansing. You cannot keep quiet when it comes to letting them know the need for having the only cure for sin in their lives. It comes out of your pores and oozes out of your body. Romans 10 says that we believe with our hearts and confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord.

How hard it is to see people you love becoming calloused towards sin, indifferent to worship, valuing material things more than Jesus, justifying their way of life that walks further and further from Jesus. Even the slightest words of encouragement may result in a rebuff and rebuke, and the battle lines are drawn. Have you ever seen two cats fighting rolling in the ground and fur flying? Watch the fur fly when mom or dad or a sister or brother pleads with someone they love to come back to Jesus and keep the blessings they have in him foremost in their lives. Watch dad put his daughter in place for daring to bring up the subject of religion and suggest that he might perish eternally without the cleansing blood of Jesus. Pray for the poor pastor who finds his phone calls being screened by members of the church who no longer want Jesus foremost in their lives.

The battle within us

In the front of our church we have a banner that reads, "You will receive power and you will be my witnesses." To be a good witness for Jesus among the members of our family and to the whole world around us we need lots of help controlling the sinful nature that wants to take over our lives and lead us to bring shame on the name of Jesus. Listen to the warnings Jesus gives us. "Anyone who love his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me."

There are so many things in life that we could easily love more than Jesus including the members of our own family. How easy it is to just want to get along with people and be friendly and loving without having to go through the painful process of telling people they need Jesus in their lives as the source of their salvation and the hope of eternal life. A mother once told her daughter that it was a sin against God to live together with her boy friend without being married. The daughter put her mother in place by saying to her,

"Mother, don't you read the Bible? Didn't Jesus say, 'Judge not you shall not be judged?'" It is so much easier just to get along and act as if nothing is wrong rather than bring the truth of God's Word to bear to the people we dearly love. How easy it is to love our loved ones more than Jesus just for the sake of peace and harmony in our lives.

It has been said that pride is the oldest sin in the world and it shows no signs of growing weaker with age. Pride is the overestimation of our own worth and our own accomplishments. Pride always wants puts Jesus and his accomplishments into a secondary position. Jesus speaks about finding life by actually losing it, and losing it by finding it. What we want to lose more than anything is the sinful pride that says, "I have the right and privilege to follow my own path and do my own thing." Pride rises up to justify sinful actions to ourselves, to others and even to God.

What do we do with this problem of wanting to hang on to sinful pride instead of giving it over to the Lord? Jesus tells us to destroy it and nail it to a cross. That is what he was referring to when he said, "and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." To illustrate this point let's go back to the flooded homes in Iowa. Look at that home that is damp and wet and beginning to grow mold. Do you cover over the mold with new dry wall and let it continue to grow within the walls of the house? No, you get rid of it. You wash it off with bleach and other chemicals. You expose it to sunlight and dry air. Then you can finally cover the framing of the house with new drywall and paint. So it is with sinful outbursts in our lives such as the sin of pride that always wants to lead you to think you are more important than Jesus and his Word. You do this by killing it on the cross with Jesus. In Romans 6 Paul tells us that it is our baptism that connects us to Jesus death, burial and resurrection. Our baptism that connects us to Christ also gives us the power to live a new life.

I am holding in my hand a rail road spike. It helps us think of the nails that were placed into the hands of Jesus. Here on this sheet of paper I have written the word "Pride." We want to take our proud hearts and nail them to the cross of Jesus. Jesus said, "He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." The book of Proverbs says, "Pride goes before destruction and haughty spirit before the fall." "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." We want to lose the heart that is deceitful above all things and have it replaced with a heart that cries out with Paul, "For me to live is Christ."

The blessed reward

Along with following Jesus and pointing people to him as the source of salvation comes a very real reward. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward." By welcoming other Christians into our lives who share the same source of salvation we are privileged to be strengthened by their testimony of faith in Jesus. Even if we do a simple act of kindness such as offering a cup of water to one of the little ones in the faith, we will be rewarded by the tremendous privilege the Lord brings into our lives.

In one of the first years of the ministry, I helped out one summer at Good Shepherd Bible camp. It was an exhausting week sleeping in a cabin with 12 ten year old boys, leading

a Bible study with teenagers and having devotions around the campfire at night. One night we used a white sheet to illustrate how Jesus covers us with his righteousness. One boy who was not going to church came up after the campfire and asked if he could go to Sunday school and hear more about Jesus and the robe of righteousness. I wonder where that boy is today. Did that one act of kindness with kids around a campfire lead him into the Word and to Jesus as the source of his salvation? The exhaustion of that one week was well worth the privilege of pointing one more person to Jesus.

The people in Iowa will eventually get their homes cleaned up, but there is only one way for sin to be removed forever. You have been lead to Jesus and now Jesus wants you to lead others to him.