

## Wangaratta Wesleyan Methodist Church 8<sup>th</sup> March 2015

### Easter Messages Preparing for the Cross: Counting the cost of following Jesus

Passages: Matthew 16:21-27; Luke 9:57-62; Matthew 20:25-28

#### **Intro: Why should we be prepared?**

I loved my time in scouts when I was young. The scout motto was 'Be Prepared' and it is something that I've tried to live by. I will never forget when Tim was a new-born Rhonda and I pulled up to McDonalds one day... **Tell story** #8 wire on front of car.

The events of Easter are so significant for the Christian that we do a disservice not to spend time preparing for the cross in our lead up to Easter. It is fitting that we take time to reread the accounts in the gospels of the Passion Week. We need to prepare ourselves emotionally and spiritually to engage with the Easter story. In fact the Easter story is so crucial to our Christian walk that it needs to be always before us so may we over the next month enter a time of reflection and personal challenge.

The cross cost a lot. It cost God his only son. It cost God the anguish of seeing his Son laden with our sin. It cost Jesus the physical, emotional and spiritual pain of being tried, flogged and crucified, separated from the Father because of our sin.

#### **1) How did Jesus count the cost?**

What was it like for Jesus leading up to the cross? Was he fully aware of all that was before him or did he simple stumble into this trap? Well Jesus did know what was coming and what the cost was to be...

##### **a. By understanding his Father's will**

Even though Jesus was fully God and fully man it seems that he temporally set aside aspects of his divinity to fulfil this unique role. At some stage in Jesus' growing up he completely understood the Father's will for his time on earth. In his humanity Jesus struggled to anticipate his death on the cross yet he knew that to do his Father's will was all important. Note Jesus' words from the gospel of John...

<sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)

Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." (John 8:28)

Despite knowing the Father's will and obeying him it wasn't easy for Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane just before Jesus was arrested we can sense the tension that Jesus wrestled with in keeping in step with the Father. Describe it... Peter, James and John

From Matthew... Luke: sweated drops of blood

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." <sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

<sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” (Matthew 26:39)

Three times Jesus asked if it could be taken away from him yet it was doing the will of the Father that was paramount.

How else did Jesus reconcile the cost of what was before him?

**b. By facing reality**

The Father’s will was that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. Throughout the Gospels we see how the religious authorities became increasingly hostile towards Jesus and his claims to be the Son of God. Jesus knew the more he spoke about his mission and the more he healed and challenged people the more he was upsetting the religious leaders. This could only mean one thing: Death for Jesus was around the corner and he knew it. Jesus had committed himself to this course and there was no turning back.

Can you identify with committing yourself to something knowing there was no turning back?

**Story:** 4WDing in the Otway Ranges in my 60 series Land Cruiser.

Jesus main mission on earth was to train 12 men to be his followers so that they in turn could teach others to follow Jesus.

**2) How did he prepare them (his followers) for the cross?**

When Jesus first called his disciples to follow him they had no idea that their leader would end up crucified on a cross. So when the time was right Jesus began to explain to them what was to happen to him.

In Matthew 10 we see the first mention of the cross. Here Jesus is beginning to point them towards the cross. But it is interesting to note that this mention of the cross is preceded by a very radical statement describing how much they needed to love Jesus. They were being prepared for the cross...

**a. By helping them to love God (and his son Jesus) first & foremost**

Jesus said, ‘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.’ In other words our love for Jesus needs to be so complete, so deep, so genuine that there is no comparison between the way we are to love Jesus and the way we love the other people in our lives.

This is a common theme throughout the bible. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert God gave them the 10 commandments to live by. The first four

commandments were about their relationship with God. The Jewish confession of faith known as the Shema recorded in Deut 4 begins,

‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.’

If they were to obey God and follow him firstly they had to learn how to love him deeply.

It is impossible to follow Jesus without first loving God wholeheartedly. So how good are we at loving God...

**i. How radical is our love for Him (God)?**

Is God the most important person in your life? Is he more important than being popular at school, having a boyfriend or girlfriend or being successful in business? Is he more important than your spouse or children? Wow that’s a hard one!

Is loving God more important than your iphone, your car or your trip overseas?

If we are serious about following Jesus, and I hope we all are, then be careful that nothing becomes more important to you than God.

A man said to Jesus in Luke Ch 9, “I will follow you wherever you go.” I’m sure the man felt that Jesus would be pleased with this sweeping statement of allegiance but Jesus challenged his commitment. I hope you realise that foxes and birds have a place to sleep but I don’t. If you want to follow me you will have to live without the security the world offers.

In this passage other people had excuses why they couldn’t follow Jesus. Finally Jesus said, “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Explain.

Is our love for God so powerful that it would cause us to pick up our cross daily and follow him? Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran who are facing death by firing squad any day now in Indonesia for drug trafficking I understand have become totally committed followers of Jesus. Expand

What does it mean for them to follow Jesus?

There is an irony in the force used to transport them to their island of death. Describe.

It reminds me of another irony 2,000 years before: Jesus being arrested by an overuse of force. Explain.

Jesus also prepared his followers for the cross...

**b. By living ‘inside out’**

Jesus turned everything on its head.

- We are to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow him.
- If you try to save your life you will lose it.
- But if you lose your life for Jesus you will save it.

- To live you must first die.
- To gain material possessions does not help you in eternity.
- You cannot serve both God and money.
- If you want to be the greatest you need to be the least.
- The first shall be last and the last will be first.

What a challenge to live in this way. How do we...

#### **i. Living 'inside out' in 2015**

Let's face it to live this way means we live opposite to the way the world thinks and acts. This is very difficult for us especially as young people. Our greatest desire as a young person is to fit in with the crowd. Now this doesn't mean we live life as a dork, prude or geek but we are called to live differently.

I'm still stunned by the way, as a church, we have raised the money needed to proceed with our extensions. Expand. A very ambitious and seemingly impossible target. Yet many people have responded trusting that God would use their gift. We asked God to provide and he did. And this is it: we are blessed when we step out in faith. Could we out-give God if we tried? The journey of trusting is more important than the money we raise or the building we build.

It takes strength of character to live differently, to live with a kingdom mindset. Let someone into the cheque before you. Give something away that is important to you. Be generous with your money. Allow yourself to die to the things of the world so you can live for God.

Why not decide to live 'inside out' for Jesus from now on? I really believe that if more Christians were prepared to live in this way we would have a powerful and profound impact on the people around us.

You know Jesus didn't tell us how to live without first demonstrating how to live that way himself. He showed his deep love for God and then asked us to do the same. He lived in an inside out and upside down way and then asked us to do the same and finally he says follow my example...

#### **c. By following and not looking back**

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem five days before he was crucified he knew there was no going back. He had arrived into the snare of the religious leaders. He knew how this week would unfold but he was following God's plan for his life.

Jesus knew when he entered the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples that there was no looking back. He was about to be arrested. Jesus knew as they nailed him to the cross that there was no going back. He was there to stay and there to die. He would soon know the

full weight of the world's sin and he would soon experience the full extent of God's wrath towards sin.

Jesus knew what it was to follow and not look back and he calls us to do the same. Why do we find this so difficult?

The Israelites struggled even though they saw the mighty hand of God before them.

- Set free but when things were tough they wanted to go back into slavery. Expand
- Are we also tempted to disown Jesus when the way becomes rough?

We struggle when we neglect to acknowledge God as our source of life, when we forget that our future is in trusting him. Jesus' words are a stinging rebuke to this attitude:

"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. <sup>33</sup> But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33)

Jesus requires nothing less than...

**i. Total commitment**

Why does Jesus raise the bar so high when it comes to our allegiance to him? Why is it such a challenge to follow him? Because Jesus knows that if our choice to follow him is only half hearted we will buckle at the knees and crumble when the going gets tough.

- Talk about weak Aussie Christians who buckle at the knees.
- What if we really faced persecution?

Total commitment is not hard work as much as it is a hard choice.

I remember making the choice to leave the farm and go into ministry: Describe

- Plenty of people to grow potatoes but there are few to preach the gospel.

What have you decided? Will you put your hand to the plough and not look back? Why not decide to follow Jesus in a radical way with total commitment and without turning back? Maybe you recognise that you have been half hearted and now realise that you need to be fair dinkum.

**Conclusion: 'I have decided to follow Jesus'**

Tell the story behind the hymn