

“What’s in It for Me?” – Pastor Jim Sprenkle – Pentecost 4 June 25, 2023

- I. **Matthew 10:24-25** – ²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”
- II. **A relationship with Jesus might not be what we expect.**
 - a. Unfortunately, the picture of Christianity and faith in Jesus has been distorted by people who are misguided at best, or false teachers and con artists at worst.
 - i. Pastors and others have promoted a faith where Jesus gives wealth and prosperity to those who follow Him... and they encourage offerings so they can live a prosperous life in front of their congregation members.
 - ii. Recently, Michele and I watched a documentary on Hillsong, the Australian megachurch that produces many Christian songs.
 1. It’s worth noting that documentaries can be misleading, but some of the allegations were enough to force several big-name resignations, including the founder of Hillsong, Brian Houston.
 2. It was interesting, but the beginning of the downfall was a guy who started taking pictures of the fancy shoes that these megachurch pastors were wearing and posting them to social media.
 - a. Especially a few of the Hillsong megachurch pastors – which showed sneakers that were worth thousands of dollars (yes, today’s basketball shoes can be worth more than fancy dress shoes)
 - b. Along with these expensive shoes, they were seen with luxury clothing and accessories in the tens of thousands of dollars.
 - c. All the while, these pastors were hobnobbing it with the rich and famous – and even giving those people special seating in the church.
 - d. It all came crashing down after investigations into misconduct and no accountability from these pastors – and today, Hillsong is trying to rebuild its reputation.
 3. The trouble is rooted in a theology of glory – or trying to avoid suffering or hardships by a strong faith and trust in God.
 - a. In other words, if you have enough faith, you don’t get sick... you won’t be poor... you won’t suffer or struggle.
 - b. For all the pastors who promote this stuff – I wonder how they handle the inevitable trials of life?

- i. Most likely by hiding it from their church and those around them – because it would expose them as the false teachers they are.
- III. **The theology of glory** tells us we don't have to suffer – we should be happy.
 - a. In many Christian circles, they teach that a strong faith will save you from suffering – and we are not immune from this mindset – we can fall for the idea that we should not have to suffer if we are God's children.
 - i. We might pray that God would take away a disease or trouble, and He may... or may not do that for us, which might cause us to question our faith or relationship with Him...
 - ii. We might also find that witnessing our faith in Jesus to others creates all kinds of suffering and trials – and we avoid it rather than cause trouble.
 - b. Sometimes we just turn our focus away from God altogether...
 - i. We don't want to suffer, or deal with loss, or trial, or rejection – so we do everything we can to avoid it.
 - 1. Some of us pop pills or use alcohol to drown out the pain.
 - 2. Some will find relief from suffering by spending money... gambling... or shopping for things we don't need.
 - 3. Some go through multiple relationships, hoping to find someone who will help the pain go away.
 - 4. Some run away to live in other places, trying to leave behind what hurts.
 - c. Here's the problem, when we run from suffering... sometimes we are running from God in the process.
 - i. Not always, but when we dodge uncomfortable things, we might be giving up an opportunity to bring glory to God.
- IV. **Jesus continues** to give instructions to His disciples before sending them out.
 - a. They will go out into a world that is full of sin, brokenness, and the devil's handiwork.
 - b. They will be called to suffer, lacking basic supplies and going to hostile places that will reject them when they witness about Jesus.
 - c. The encouragement they receive is to prepare them so they will expect the worst as they go... not on a mission of peace, but to stir up a hornet nest.
 - i. They should expect families to be divided... people to be angry... threats to life and limb... and to be rejected.
 - d. Our Old Testament prophet today, Jeremiah, is questioning God about the mission he's been sent on to call people to repentance.
 - i. He basically tells God that he's been misled, that since doing God's will, he's become a laughingstock and the butt of jokes... he is alone in his work, and he's suffering.

- e. Jesus tells His disciples not to fear the people and trials that will oppose them, because God is with them each step of the way.
 - i. It is far greater to serve the Lord and suffer for doing it than to serve ourselves in order to avoid suffering.
- f. Regardless of what we fear, it is always best to walk forward with the Lord... who is not asking us to do anything He wouldn't do first.

V. **Jesus helps us to understand what following Him really means.**

- a. ²⁴ “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”
 - i. In this context, do you see how Jesus is looking at His followers and saying they should not expect to be treated any better than He will be?
 - ii. Jesus tells them that they will suffer – because they are certainly not deserving of less suffering than Jesus – but it is enough that they be like Him.
 - iii. How does that make you feel?
 - 1. Following Jesus should not be a cakewalk, it includes battling the forces of evil that want to separate us and all people from the Truth.
 - 2. Of course our nature is for self-preservation – but God is also calling us to look outward and love others... along with bring Him glory.
- b. Jesus knew He was the Lamb of God, or the one to be sacrificed to take away the sins of the world.
- c. Jesus suffered... not only in the life leading up to His earthly ministry as a young man, but also in unimaginable ways by the hands of evil men, as He was tortured and nailed to a cross.
 - i. If the Teacher and Master had chosen to avoid suffering, we have no payment for our sins on the cross.
 - ii. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before He was arrested, Jesus prayed for the burden of torture and death to be removed... but ended, “Thy will be done” to His Father.
 - iii. In other words, Jesus would endure suffering and death to save us from hell... and bring glory to the Father.

VI. **We are not above Jesus, but it is enough to be like Him.**

- a. Almost always people want to know the answer to a question before they commit their time and energy to something – “What’s in it for me?”
- b. Sure, many Christians believe it’s all about wealth and prosperity as they come to faith in Christ...

- c. The more realistic answer, from Jesus' own words are, "You will suffer for Me, you will struggle against the powers of evil all your life, and you might just lose everything...including your life..."
 - i. But we are also reminded of Paul's words in Philippians, "I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:20-21) Amen