

Jesus: Profit or Loss?

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Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

March 8, 2009

Romans 4:13 - 5:1 ¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. ¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")-- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³ Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Mark 8:27 - 9:1 ²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

When you turn on the news on TV or pick up the newspaper on almost any given day at almost any given moment in the day, we are likely to see or hear news about the state of the economy. Everywhere in the world, there is anxiety and fears about turnabout of the forecast of the stock markets. Many of us, worried about our job security, keeping our homes, paying the bills, getting the simplest things, even the priority for medicines. If we were to have a profit and loss statement presented to us at the next meeting of world and national leaders, we would look at the *Profit and Loss* report to check our financial health. If we could sum up the health of our world and national economy right

now, most of us do not have to be Harvard economists to say that there is a great loss going on and that we have fallen into a deep recession. Even some are suggesting that we are entering a depression time.

In today's scripture, Jesus refers to a "Profit and Loss" statement also - not economical in terms of dollars and cents; but it is about the *economy of God's grace revealed to us through Jesus*. If the cross were an indicator of the health of those lives connected to Jesus, it would have to signal dire circumstances. At the very least the cross would be a scandal, a tripping or stumbling block to the mighty and a folly to the wise.

In today's lesson, the ever lovable and impetuous Peter stumbles right into this crazy economy of God's grace. They are in the middle of their journey. This is the turning point. All that has come before has been in preparation for what lies ahead. The disciples, chief among them, Peter, have followed Jesus for about 3 years. They have seen and heard his teachings and healings.

They have been first hand witnesses to what you and I can only dream about. Now Jesus has led them to a spot called Caesarea Philippi. The spot itself is a shock especially for the question posed to Peter - "Who do you say that I am?" The unequivocal response that came from Peter's lips are legendary to this day - "You are the Messiah." Period. Peter seemed rock sure of himself and his answer until Jesus replied with an additional comment.

. ³¹ *Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.* ³² *He said all this quite openly."* But this didn't jive for Peter. He couldn't wrap his mind around this man whom he had just declared as the Messiah to be one who would suffer in this way. Such a suffering on the cross was reserved for criminals. Roman crosses were nothing like the gold jewelry crosses that we wear today.

To his horror I would imagine, Jesus immediately rejected Peter's rejection with the famous, "get behind me Satan" remark. What was in the mind of Jesus and what was in the mind of Peter were vastly different, so much so that it left poor Peter visibly shaken and speechless, which is not an easy accomplishment for the outspoken apostle.

Then, as if to clarify and amplify this comment about the cross that was reserved for the Messiah, he offered the cross to all of his followers, many more than just the 12 disciples who were close to him; but he reached out to the thousands that would come to hear him speak and to heal. To them he spoke straightforwardly and bluntly also, perhaps weeding out the faint of heart when he did so. He told them that this cross experience of the Messiah should also be the experience of the disciple.

Take it up willingly without question as a servant of God for the glory of God also. We must hate this life in the way that anything that we are and will be that is contrary to God must be cast aside

for the new creature hood of Jesus. We can share this crucifixion, painful as it will be to crucify our passions and our ways that are not God's ways and thoughts.

He added to it a challenge that haunts every Christian in every age. . ³⁵ *For those who want to **save their life** will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, **will save** it. ³⁶ *For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"* This is the paradox that causes each of us to wonder what it means to have a life in relationship to God's son. Holding on to what we now know, believe, and practice will not be profitable in the Kingdom of God. It means that we disciples will have to change inside out, change our ways, change our attitudes, change our concept of justice - be different than what we had been. Nothing less will mean a loss in the economy of grace column on the register of God's profit and loss sheet.*

Now, I must admit, I am puzzled about Peter. He is a person who has faith, but waffles, denies, forsakes, and yet becomes the single most important disciple to rise up after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Little is said in the scriptures about his thoughts and feelings at this key moment in history. Here they are at the most inconceivable place - Caesarea Philippi - the place of Greek worship of the God named Pan and his consort, Echo. Here at this place three streams come together and flow through this cave that then becomes the Jordan river. Jesus stops here to pose the ultimate question at a place where one of the most powerful cultures of history has marked a place to worship false gods. What was Peter thinking at that moment? Surely it was a lot to take in and process.

So, I want to be Peter for a moment. I want to imagine this man's thoughts and his reactions that set the course of history of our Christian faith. Wait just a moment as I change into this man, Peter.

Good morning. My name is Simon; or that was my birth name. I have a family like most of you. My father, brother and me are simple people. Our living is simple. We fish in the Sea of Galilee. I would have done that to the day I died, except for this man, this phenomenal person, who can speak such words that I have never heard spoken. He came to me and to my brother, Andrew, as we were fishing. We saw him but did not know why he was here. His reputation came before him. We knew of his amazing authority with teaching the sacred scriptures of the prophets, especially Isaiah. The word had spread quickly that he was different, maybe even God's agent, one who had authority over spirits. Here he was calling out my name and my brother. It was an honor, which I could not resist. He said come with me and fish a different way for people. Here I am a fisher of fish and he wants me to change my occupation. What is this all about?

The force of appeal and the power of his holy presence were enough for me. I had to go. I had to know more and I had to accept his offer. This is special and it is an honor to be with this man and to learn from him.

What I saw in the next 3 years were more than convincing to me. He never came out and said it - I am the Messiah; but we all suspected it and believe it was true. No one could do or speak of God unless he were of God himself.

When the day came and we passed on from Galilee and were walking toward the sea by way of Caesarea Philippi, he cornered me once again and put me on the spot. "Who am I to you, Peter?" he asked me. I just said what I believed him to be. If anyone was the Messiah, it would have to be Jesus. I said so. You are the Messiah. I was proud of myself for finally saying what all the rest of us would only whisper about him in our private conversations. But, I knew. He is he Messiah.

But that wasn't enough. He cut me down quickly to size. He said that he would suffer, die and be resurrected on the third day. This I could not understand. How could God's Messiah suffer and die? God wouldn't allow it. What would this mean to the cause of the kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming all over the place? How can I take up a cross also? This would mean putting myself at risk of humiliation and death at the hands of the Romans. Wouldn't that end all this business right then and there? Sure it would. I was no fool. But, he insisted and I persisted with him as long as I could until that day when what he said began to unfold. He was arrested after we had our dinner in the upper room. It was our last time to eat together and he mentioned privately that his hour was near. A cold chill came over me. I could not imagine nor believe that he would allow this to happen. Then it did. He asked me if I would stay with him and not leave or deny him. I said "yes." Of course I would not believe or say anything else. "Yes, I will never deny or leave you." But, I was

scared deeply. When the soldiers asked me if I belonged with him, I could not summon the courage to face the cross that Jesus offered me and I knew would happen if I said "Yes, I know this man, yes, I love this man." So I said instead, "no." The rooster crowed and I was struck to the quick. I did it. I lied to him. I failed him. How shameful I was. Could he ever understand or forgive me. His look was too much when I saw him carrying the cross, stumbling, hurting, dying. He did what I could not do, nor would I want to do.

What will I do now? What would you do? I do believe him; but I could not give up myself to him. I kept back and I did not go. Would you?. When we left Caesarea Philippi, I thought, "Yes, I can do it. I will stick by him; and I can be just who I am without a cross to bear." Now, I am not so sure."

It is time to change back. I am no longer Peter. I am just a simple pastor in this crazy 21st century great country of America.

I don't face many Roman crosses. Do you? Would you? Would you, if it were put to you?

These are days that we ask such questions. We ponder what it means to follow Jesus and to be his disciple. These are days when we ask what it means to have a crucifixion experience. Do we need it or do we just hang a pretty cross on our necks? Even celebrities like to hang these big gaudy crosses.

The journey to Easter is one that passes through our own places of Caesarea Philippi. Our journey brings the question to us, "What profit is it to be like Jesus?" What do we gain and what do we lose? What are we willing to change to be authentic to this call, "come and follow me and take up the cross? It is not his cross then. It will be our own cross to bear.

Change is the hardest thing that any of us has to face. We seldom change unless our backs are against the wall and we have no other choices? That is the plight of our planet today. Do we change or do we keep on the same path. We have seen the greed

and self serving ways of the rich and the powerful. Do we go along or not? Where do we start, if not right here at Caesarea Philippi?

Who is Jesus to you?