

"FOCUSING ON THE KINGDOM"

Micah 6: 6-8; Luke 9: 57-62

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Giving our hearts to God: When we give our hearts to God, we give God all. Giving our hearts to God means we have a trusting relationship with Jesus. We understand it best when we see another person who has a trusting relationship with Jesus. Can you think of a person you know who is a wonderful example of someone who has given their heart to God?

Giving our hearts to God is more than participating in joyful worship and believing the right things. It is about putting your trust and love for Jesus into action in helping your neighbours. It is clear from the Bible, that God wants us to put our faith into action. The message of Micah 6:6-8 is to do what God requires of us – to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. The Israelites whom this message was directed to did not give their whole heart to God and they needed to be reminded. Are you giving your heart to God or just a small piece?

Fast-Food Faith: Our society is focused upon comfort and the avoidance of suffering at all cost. As followers of Christ we must cultivate countercultural disciples willing to put themselves aside for the sake of the other. Furthermore, we are called by God to be individuals who will intentionally choose discomfort and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom.

We must begin to be honest about this instead of seeking after the comfort and convenience of fast-food faith. Fast-food faith could be explained in this way: one takes the comfort and nourishment God freely gives, but merely to sustain one's self in their self-directed busy life. One hardly has time for God, but gets a quick bite to give strength for one's own agenda. This kind of fast-food faith may be a place to start, but will not foster and build understanding that the Christian life is about change from following one's own way towards following the way of Jesus Christ.

Following Jesus is not a comfortable life. In our scripture reading today from Luke 9, Jesus is giving a picture of the Christian life as difficult and not very comfortable – "*the Son of Man has no place to lay his head (Luke 9: 58).*" Jesus definitely is calling the three potential disciples in this story to follow him, but he does candy coat it. He says to them that they need to put the Kingdom of God before any other comforts or relationships in life. In many churches today, there is such a great emphasis on increasing attendance. Certainly, we want to share the love of Christ with as many people as we can. However, sometimes in reaching this goal, the Gospel presented is comfortable and does not challenge, threaten or put one out of one's way. It is user-friendly in a way that it does not intrude and upset our daily schedules and obligations. In

our comfort oriented culture, people are more likely to go where they are comfortable. One could say that as you look at today's scripture, Jesus seems to be doing the exact opposite. Jesus is saying that it is not about you or your customs and traditions. It is about taking up your cross and following him.

Following on Jesus terms: The trouble with the third follower of Jesus in our story in Luke 9 is that when he says he will follow Jesus he makes his own offer and on his own terms (he will follow Jesus if he first says good-bye to his family). From our perspective, this may seem like a reasonable demand. Certainly, it is good to say good-bye to your family, but the point here is that the family relationships must not get in the way of following Christ and His Kingdom. My wife Jackie said this to me soon after we were married: "If you died I would still have God. But, if I did not have God, you would not be enough." I believe that because Jackie put God first, she is able to love me with a deeper, Christ-like love. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that Jesus never said that we must make a choice between him and the devil - -that would be too easy! Instead, Jesus says that we must make a choice between him and those we love. If the people you love get in the way of following Christ, then choose Christ instead.

Following as a way of life: Theologian and preacher Fred Craddock, in a talk to other ministers, spoke about living the life of discipleship in our 'instant' society. This instant mentality Craddock was speaking about could be expressed in this way: Christians sometimes believe that the best way of following Christ means doing glorious big acts that show complete giving of one's self. Being martyred for the sake of the Gospel would be an example of this. Craddock stated this: *"We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table— 'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."* (Leadership magazine, Fall 1984).

Jesus wants us to be free from insisting on our own way. It is important to put out 25 cents here and 50 cents there on a daily basis! One of our problems is procrastination. Yes, we know Jesus' way is the way to joy and the way to advancing the Kingdom of God, but "I will get to that later" we say. Jesus wants to set us free from self-sufficiency. Jesus wants to set us free from the obstacles that keep us from following him. Do not insist on your own way saying for example, "I will get to helping my neighbor next month". This kind of thinking is not discipleship because the Gospel is then second to your personal agenda!

At first glance of the scripture passage, it looks like Jesus is turning away disciples, but actually he is telling them how they can be free. Don't settle for fast food, comfortable and convenient faith. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added on to you". Amen.