

“BEING LIKE JESUS WHEN WE DON’T LIKE IT”

Some may take offense to the very notion that imitating Jesus would ever require us to do something we wouldn’t like to do. Somewhere along the line the self-serving concept has slipped into the church that our Lord never wants us to be uncomfortable. Yet, if we are going to be “*like*” Jesus, we will need to break out of our comfort zones. I mean, what in His call to “*pick up our cross and follow Him*” indicates any differently? (Luke 14:27)

At times, we will need to do some things we “*don’t like*” to do. For to be “*like Him*” we will need to change our priorities, forsaking some of the stuff we really “*like*” for things that we “*dislike*” - perhaps even that we “*hate*” - doing.

I, for one, love spending time with my physical family, my friends, and my church family. This is not only natural; it is often necessary. Yet, Jesus cautioned us not to open our hearts and homes only to those who love us or who can repay us in Luke 14:13-14: **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”** Jesus not only taught this, He practiced it. Now, he may not have ever thrown a banquet, but He fed 1000’s of people on more than one occasion who hadn’t the means to return the favor. He also often served the poor, the outcast, and the downtrodden. So, we will need to move out into our community in new ways. We will need to open our arms wider to extend love to people who have not experienced it.

Having said this, Jesus also instructed His followers not to waste time on those who have the doors of their hearts closed to Him. In Luke 9:5 He said, **“If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.”** Maybe you get that – or at least think you do. The best way that I have found to understand what Jesus meant is to look at how He lived out the principle. When did He ever do what He tells us to do?

Reading through John chapters 6-9, we see that Jesus once refused to feed the crowds because He perceived that all they cared about was their selfish appetites. Shortly thereafter, some folks tried to pressure Jesus into leading them the way they wanted to be led, but He slipped away to be by Himself for a time before preaching in Capernaum. Though none has ever been a greater servant, He would not be “*used*” or “*manipulated*” by anyone, especially if it hindered Him from His calling. When the Jews grumbled against Him – even plotting to do Him harm - He left with His followers to minister in Galilee. Later, Teachers of the Law were offended by Jesus’ claim to be “*The I Am*” and gathered stones to kill Him, but He slipped away from them again.

Within a very short time He approached a man in the outer courts to heal him of a lifetime of blindness. So, we can see that Jesus often left the skeptics to teach those who were more open to Him.

The more we become like Him, the more we'll know when it's time to reach out beyond our familiar surroundings – even perhaps walking away from those who only want to engage in fruitless debates or senseless arguments or aren't willing to listen at all. I can tell you from personal experience that this is a heart wrenching thing to do. I have too often thought that one more conversation with just the right approach will certainly break through...only to find I'm still talking to the wall. It was so hard to admit that I was "*wasting precious time*" that needed to be devoted to more fertile fields.

That didn't mean that I quit praying for them or that I stopped looking for opportunities to share my faith, but it did mean that I directed my energies elsewhere. Sometimes, it was just outside "*the temple courts*" that I found someone who was open to the word of God. Sometimes it was ½ way around the world. Bottom line is that I found out "**to be like Jesus**" often means going to unfamiliar places and interacting with people that are "*not like*" us. It often requires leaving our comfort zones to be a comfort to others. It requires service and sacrifice that, to be honest, we often won't "*like*."

This evening we will be leading a chapel service at the Rescue Mission. Afterward we will be serving a meager meal to those who are gathered. I'm trusting that there will be people there who are open to hear the good news about Jesus. I know it is out of the comfort zone of many believers to interact with people whom may not be as clean or as tidy or as well-groomed as those they are used to rubbing elbows with. But, its exactly the kind of people Jesus is calling us to minister to. I appreciate those who are providing the meals, but I ask you to also come join us if you can. Encourage those there with your presence as you praise and worship God. As you have opportunity, greet them graciously. Smile warmly. Bless them with kind words and expressions of kindness. Show them Jesus.

Then next Saturday, Lord willing, a small team from Calvary will be leaving for Haiti for a short-term mission. We're believing we will be able to share Jesus with Haitian children in a (*Vacation*) Bible School setting. I am also believing that their parents and grandparents will stick around to hear a message about God's plan to save all who will trust in His Son Jesus. The accommodations will not be ideal and the food will not be what we're used to. It will be hot and muggy and very uncomfortable. The water isn't safe to drink and the conditions are far from sanitary. So, why are we going? It's one more way we can be like Jesus, the greatest missionary who ever lived! Team members have had malaria and typhoid and Hep C and tetanus immunizations. But, what we need is the Lord's protection and providence, so we covet your prayers.

Bottom line, is we all need the Lord's help when it comes to imitating Jesus...

Especially when it comes to following His lead into areas of service or surrender where we'd just as soon not go. I recall having once said that I'd rather "*take a beating*" than preach. That was before I considered what "*a beating my Lord suffered*" to save me from eternal separation from God. For if He endured the cross for me, surely I can endure whatever He asks me to do.