

Opening:

A little girl, dressed in her Sunday best, was running as fast as she could, trying not to be late for Bible class. As she ran she prayed, 'Dear Lord, please don't let me be late! Dear Lord, please don't let me be late!' While she was running and praying, she tripped on a curb and fell, getting her clothes dirty and tearing her dress. She got up, brushed herself off, and started running again! As she ran she once again began to pray, 'Dear Lord, please don't let me be late...But please don't shove me either!'

→ Set Oral Reading by Rob & Gerry Smith “Take Up Your Cross”

Readings: **Genesis 17: 1-14** Everlasting Covenant with Abraham the sign - circumcision
Romans 4: 13-15 16, 17 God's promise God to Abraham - not based upon obedience to the law – but right relationship with God

Last week's focus on Jesus beginning ministry: Goes to Jordon River to be baptized by John

This week we jump to an early moment in Jesus' ministry where he reveals his destiny - purpose for his coming to his disciples – His death on the Cross

Read **Matthew 16: 13-28** Instead of **Mark 8:31-25**

This passage is one of those moments – where we get to listen in on a behind closed doors private conversation not intended the masses just the 12 disciples

→ If you want more from God – these words were meant for you to hear!

Jesus asks the question –“Who do men say that I am?”

The group replies: “*Well ... they say different things – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.*”

But... “Who do you say I am?” The real question

Jesus hadn't yet told his disciples who he really was.

What's the big secret? It's almost like Jesus is a superhero with a secret identity. But this is the moment of enlightenment ... “Who do you say that I am?”

Peter had held his response – but then spoke under the leading of the Holy Spirit - with clarity and confidence “*You are the Messiah – the Christ - the son of the living God.*”

“You are blessed Simon – only my Father in Heaven could have revealed this to you ...”

Can you picture Peter, smiling from ear to ear? You don't have to be a mentalist to read his thoughts.

Yeah that's right – Jesus and I are pals - maybe even equals – after all God the Father just spoke directly to me, I must be special!

Then Jesus begins to tell them the future - how he would suffer terribly at the hands of the chief priests and elders and be killed in Jerusalem but rise from the dead three days later.

The disciples are as silent as a stone - wide eyed and confused

* Note there is been no mention of the word **Cross** as yet by Jesus

Peter, who is already a legend in his own mind, puts an arm on Jesus' shoulder to lovingly straighten him out and reprimand him for saying such things

“Heaven forbid – this will never happen to you!”

When God is working in our life its time to listen ... and keep our big mouths shut.

Peter who just ascended to the heavens (Ahhh) comes crashing down to the depths

Jesus rebukes Peter – calling him Satan. *“Get out of my way Satan.”*

He recognizes that voice from his 40 day fast.

The devil showed Jesus all the Kingdoms of the World – “All this will I give you – you don't have to suffer no cross – all you have to do is bow down and worship me.”

Jesus laid it out plainly to the 12 – gave it to them straight! You want to follow me –turn from your selfish – self-centered thinking – take up your cross - and follow me.

There is the first mention of The Cross – more specifically their Cross

Jews hated the Cross

A Roman form of capital punishment – no Roman citizen could be crucified (**bill of rights**) it was a gruesome form of punishment that could take days before death came.

Being burnt at the stake - beheaded – hanged – later shot by firing squad and the electric chair – all child's play ... mercy killings by comparison.

The cross was a statement – a declaration of terror - this could happen to you!

The cross was only for slaves – pirates and enemies of Rome

Jesus' words cut deep *“You want to be my disciple – then take up your cross and follow me.”*

He wasn't speaking of a literal crucifixion concerning them

He was referring to a relationship based on truth

Lets go back to **Romans 16: 9-15** (Paul's commentary on Genesis account of Abraham)

Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith.

But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised!

Covenant Signs

- Circumcision was a sign of the old covenant-
- Water Baptism a sign of the new covenant

When Jesus went down to the Jordan to be baptized by John it was a Cataclysmic event
John represented the Old Covenant - **The law** the Kingdom of Man – the last prophet of the Old T

Jesus was The Kingdom of Heaven come down in Human form – the new covenant –New T
Jesus baptism ... signified his mission: to die be buried and rise again ... This is the essence of
the Gospel!

Water baptism is a choice – a declaration **I have decided to follow Jesus**
I'm burying my old life and beginning a new one with God in Charge.

That's what Jesus was asking his disciples to do - What he is asks us to do –
To enter a faith relationship with Him – just like Abraham did

Read - Let Down Your Hair Daily Bread

“If you try to hang on to your life ...” do it your way - live a **convenient** religious life – you'll
lose it – lose the meaning – the purpose –the joy -

“But if you give up life for my sake you will save it.” This is not a threat – it's an outcome

→ This is the same story for the **Rich Young Ruler** asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life.
[Luke 18:18-23](#)

Jesus replied: Obey the commandments – “... *all these things I have done from childhood*”

But unspoken by the young man ... I know something is still missing ...

That's why he's there – keeping the rules isn't enough –never will be!

That's why he's there asking Jesus for the secret - what am I missing?

“...Go and sell everything you own and come and follow me.” Sound familiar no mention of
the cross because that was for their ears only?

In the 19th century lived the richest Americans ever – during what is called the Gilded Age. The
Morgan's – Carnegies – The Rockefellers A time when 1% of the people controlled 99% of all
the wealth in the nation.

This is where the term philanthropist originates – Rockefeller and Carnegie gave away large
sums of money for public projects and charities in their last days. This where Rockefeller
Center – Carnegie Hall

Why did they do it?

They were empty – they had everything - but nothing and they were trying to recapture what
they had traded away – their lives – their souls

Funny thing today in the 21 Century two of the richest men alive Bill Gates & Warren Buffet
are doing the same thing!

“What good is it if you gain the whole world but loose (yourself) your soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?”

His journal entry for October 28, 1949, expresses his belief that missions work was more important than his life. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Ecuador

Closing

Communion what a perfect way to reflect on the call of the Lord to you -

This season of Lent is not about religiously giving something up – it’s about gaining

A trade

Its about shedding the clutter that stands between your and God in your faith relationship

As you prepare to take communion – listen for God’s voice – what would He ask you to set aside as an act of love or devotion?

Food – language – media – alcohol – gossip – a critical spirit –

A preoccupation with something: collections - sports – lust – career - money –TIME