

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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I MUST BE ABOUT MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

Luke 2:49

The first recorded words of our Lord Jesus are found in Luke 2:49. This is what we read.

Luke 2:49. And He (Jesus) said to them (to his parents), "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

We know the context of these words. This incident happened when Jesus was about twelve years old. Mary and Joseph brought him to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. After the feast, on their way back home, Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was not with the caravan. They had assumed that he was among the other travelers. They decided to return to Jerusalem to search for him. To their great relief, they found him in the Temple, discussing with teachers of the word of God. Still affected by this incident, Mary said to Jesus, 'Son, why have you done that! We were looking for you everywhere.' Jesus then answered with those words: *Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*

A sense of direction

This sentence can be examined from various angles. What I would like to highlight in this lesson is that even from his early youth, Jesus had the consciousness of his mission. Because this sentence is clearly a declaration of mission. The business that He talked about was the work for which He was sent by his Heavenly Father, that is, to preach the Gospel and to die for the sins of mankind. At twelve years old, Jesus already had a clear sense of direction for his life. He knew where he was going when He walked on this earth.

In our lesson today, we want to talk about spiritual direction. As a Christian, what is the whole direction of our life? Where are we going spiritually? Do we have any sense of direction? Have you ever asked yourself these questions? We are going to look at Jesus' own life as an example for us to follow.

Now, if you do not move, you do not need to worry about direction. You just stay where you are. But the moment you begin to move, you have to know where you are going. Therefore you must have a sense of direction, of where you plan to go. In real life, it is impossible to remain immobile. Even if you refuse to move, life has a way to force you to move. Even if you do not want to make decisions, life will make decisions for you. It is just impossible not to move. Most people have a sense of what they want to do, and they make decisions according to their aspirations. The philosophy that guides their decisions usually is to make life better for them, to have a comfortable and happy existence ... until death comes. The various directions of life that people take all end up at the same

point: at the grave. No matter how wonderful or how bad was the direction of one's life, the movement of life eventually stops at the grave.

If you are a Christian, let me ask you this question. Do you have a direction for your life? If so, what is it? And how is it different from that of a non-Christian?

Heading persistently towards the cross

On this subject, let's now look at Jesus' life. In Matthew 26:1-2, we find these words. *When Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified."* 'You know that the Son of man will be crucified.' How did the disciples know that Jesus was going to be crucified? They knew because the Lord had told them twice already. This is the third time He is telling them about his crucifixion. It amazes me that during all the time He was with his disciples, Jesus had the clear goal and direction before him: the cross. His whole life had a clear direction, and it was to move towards the cross and the redemption of mankind. His sight was set upon the cross. And everything in his life was moving steadily towards that direction. Nothing distracted him from that goal. He knew right from the beginning where he was going, and He was committed to move in that direction no matter what.

And more than that, notice how Jesus spoke those words with a certain calm and determination. In two days time, He was going to suffer a terrible death. But there was no panic. He spoke with a 'dignified calm,' if we can say that, the calm of a person who knows where his whole life had been heading to, and now, He is beginning to reach his goal.

So when we look at Jesus' life, there is this pattern that we see. Jesus moved with a clear sense of direction. He knew precisely where He was going. If we claim to be his disciples, do we have the same assurance? Do we know where we are going? Does our life show that we have a firm direction, just like our Master?

We can also take the example of the apostle Paul. Paul was a man who knew exactly where he was going. Listen to his words in Philippians 3:14: *I press toward the mark.* All his life after his conversion, Paul was focused on one particular goal. In the context of this verse, it was to be conformed to the image of Christ, to be perfect as He is perfect. Paul always kept in his mind the goal of growing and maturing in Christ.

Even at the end

We began this lesson by quoting the first recorded words of Jesus. Luke 2:49: *I must be about My Father's business.* We mentioned that in that statement, Jesus' sense of direction and purpose was already apparent. Now when we look at his last recorded statement, we can only conclude that he moved in that same direction right up to the end. This is what we read in John 19:30: *When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."* With that, He bowed his head and gave up his spirit. What is this 'it', in *It is finished*? It is his mission, the task which He has been pursuing steadfastly all his life. Now, as He was about to take his last breath, He could say, 'It is finished.' 'Mission accomplished,' we can say. During all his life, his eyes were constantly fixed on his task. And now, it is coming to an end. *It is finished.*

The spirit of those words is reflected in the words of Paul when he himself was about to be executed. He said in 2Timothy 4:7: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* Paul had run his race. He reached the end of the road. He completed his task. He did not drop out half way. God entrusted him with a task and he was determined to accomplish it. And he did.

This sense of purpose continues to be seen in many other statements of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said in John 17:4, *I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.* Here the Lord Jesus is praying his final prayer to his Father. He said He brought glory to God on earth. How did He do that? By finishing the work God asked him to accomplish. By this time, He has finished the task of laying the foundation of his church. Soon, He will leave his disciples and be arrested. But even in those tensed moments, Jesus never lost his focus. He never lost his sense of direction. When I reflect on Jesus' words here, I wonder how many of us, Christians, will be able to say at the end of our life, 'Heavenly Father, I have glorified you on earth. I have finished my work.'

Even when his soul was troubled

Here is another passage that shows Jesus' constant sense of direction. Let's look at John 8:14. This one is pretty obvious. *Jesus answered, Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.* 'I know where I am from and where I am going.' Jesus had come from heaven, to accomplish the will of his Father. God sent him into this world to declare the glorious message of salvation. That was always in Jesus' mind in all his actions.

What was the purpose of Jesus' life? Jesus expresses it very clearly in John 12:27. *Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.* 'I came for this specific purpose.'

Earlier on, in v. 23 of the same chapter, Jesus was pondering about losing his life. John 12:23: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* In the gospel of John, to 'be glorified' means 'to die.' 'I came for the purpose of dying, dying for the sins of mankind. And the hour has come.'

On this point, the Lord Jesus draws a parallel with us. And so, He continues his thought by saying in vv. 24 and 25, *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.* When we observe nature, we notice that a seed must die in order to produce many new seeds. If it does not die, we cannot expect any fruit. When Jesus was speaking about his death in v. 23, He was applying the same truth at the spiritual level. It was necessary for him to die in order to bring forth spiritual fruit. Then in v. 24, He says that the same principle applies to us too. If we hang on to our life, we will lose it. But if we are willing to lose it for God, something extraordinary will happen. We will gain it unto eternal life. Jesus was the first seed. There was only one seed when He came into the world. He fell into the ground and died. What came forth? A handful of regenerated disciples. Then many more disciples came into being with each generation. 'A grain that died produced much grain.'

And then Jesus goes on to say in v. 27, *Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.* The moment is approaching. 'I know that I will be crucified and the thought of dying troubles me. But I shall not turn away from the goal. I shall not say, 'Father, save me from this time of suffering.' I will say, 'Father, if it is your will, I will go on to the cross.'" Here in the middle of the gospel of John, we see that constant clarity of direction that Jesus had, even when his soul was in distress.

It is interesting to notice that in v. 35, Jesus talks about walking in the dark. Because when you walk in darkness, you actually lose your sense of direction. John 12:35. *Then Jesus told them, 'You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.'* He who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. He who walks in the dark has no sense of direction. Which situation applies more to us? Are we walking in the light, knowing where we are going, with a clear sense of direction? Or are we walking in the dark, not knowing where we are going, walking with no sense of direction?

Even in his teaching

Not only the life of Jesus shows a clear direction, but his teaching shows the same characteristic. In Luke 14:28-31, Jesus talks about the important decision of becoming a Christian.

Luke 14:28. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?

29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

There are several things that need to be taken into account when we intend to build a tower. We first need to count the cost. In order to count the cost, we have to plan the kind of building we want to build. What will be the size of the tower? What equipment is needed? How many workers have to be hired? What kind of material will be used? The building of a tower requires planning. And planning means that we have a clear idea of how the tower is going to be built.

In the second example of this passage, Jesus compares the decision to follow him to a king who must decide whether or not he should go to war.

Luke 14:31. Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

With odds like these, the king will have to plan his campaign very carefully. He could take some chances if his army were three times bigger than the size of his enemy. But if his army is only half the size of his opponents, he will have to plan his war extremely carefully because he cannot afford to lose too many men. If he still decides to go to war, he will have to plan every detail of it. No general will win any battle if he is not well prepared.

The Bible tells us that there is a war going on right now, a war of a spiritual nature. And in a sense, the odds seem to be very much against the Christian. We appear to be outnumbered, within and without. From inside, we have the weakness of our flesh which can be influenced by the constant temptations that the world wants to show us. From outside, we have all the pressures of life. Family, work, money, sickness... But the Bible tells us that the Christian is victorious when he abides in Christ. He will never be crushed by those forces if he puts his trust in Jesus.

Imitating Jesus' sense of direction

The Lord Jesus concludes this section with these words in v. 33: *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.* The requirement that Jesus puts before us is nothing less than a total commitment on our part. We just talked about warfare. No soldier can be a good soldier if he is not ready to die. A good soldier is committed to die for his country. Total commitment is also required of the person who intends to build a tower. He has to forsake all that he has. He has to put everything that he has into the task of building the tower.

Jesus began this passage with this statement in v. 27. *And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.* These words give us the direction that we are to take. You remove those words, and we have no more direction. 'Carry your cross and follow me.' 'I am going this way, and you follow me. My direction in life should become yours.' What was Jesus' direction? 'My goal in life is to die for the redemption of mankind and to give them life.' That has to be our goal too in life. That is how we follow him. If we do not share the same goal, we cannot be his disciple. You see, you and I are called to this mission, the mission of saving others. We do not just enjoy

salvation, but we ought to live for the salvation of others. That has to be our goal. We cannot be a true disciple if the direction of our life is not the same as Jesus' direction, i.e. we live for the salvation of others. When we do that, we have taken up our cross and followed Jesus. From now on, we do not live for ourselves anymore. We live for the salvation of our fellow men.

We cannot call ourselves Christians if we do not share the same direction of life that Jesus had. The apostle Paul was walking in the same direction as Jesus. He said in 2Timothy 2:10, *Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* Paul was willing to be poured out as a sacrifice for the salvation of others, following the steps of the Lord Jesus. Elsewhere he said, *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ* (1Corinthians 11:1). On this aspect, we are all going into the same direction. We are all carrying our cross. We are all laying down our life for others.

Build on the foundation

One last comment. And it is about the church. Every authentic Christian should have this one clear goal in his mind: the up building of the church of Christ. The church is God's ordained means by which God will save mankind. Therefore, if we are to live and die for the salvation of others, we have to begin where God began, with His church. We want to build the temple of God. In 1Corinthians 3:10, Paul wrote, *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.* Paul describes himself as a master builder. And he goes on to say that 'everyone of you is engaged in this task of building the church of God.' 'I have laid the foundation. You build on it.'

So then, what is the common purpose? In the context of this passage about the church, each disciple is part of a team which has one purpose: to bring people into God's kingdom and to see them grow in their faith. This is accomplished through the fellowship of Christ's suffering. We have fellowship with his suffering when we share the same direction of his life. We have fellowship with his suffering when we take up our cross. There is no living for self anymore. Nothing has more priority than God and his righteousness. We live for God and God only. Everything else is secondary. Our whole direction and goal is the salvation of mankind, just as it was for the Lord Jesus. And in order to do this, we build up God's people. We build up his church.