

## SERMON 2: Do You Believe? DO SOMETHING

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Let the words of my mouth and meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We are preparing for battle in our daily walk with Jesus as we prepare our hearts to stand firm in our faith in Christ, to pray earnestly and directly, and act upon our faith and new life in Christ as we reach out to others with His love.

Here's our question for today: Which way is up (ask them to point)? Actually, in our Gospel lesson today Jesus says the way up is actually down. He says, **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."** (Mk. 8:34-5)

The Gospel makes no sense to us, humanly speaking. Even Peter, who earlier in chapter 8 recognized Jesus as the Christ, couldn't comprehend a Messiah who would die. That simply didn't add up. But, that's exactly what Jesus did. Paul wrote to the Philippians, **"Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...(and) humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** (Phil. 2:6-8) Jesus didn't think he was too holy or high and mighty, but looked down upon us with compassion, came down among us to be like us, to live sinless for us, and yet die guilty and condemned in our place. And when he rose from the dead, he lifted us up from the mire of our sin and our death sentence, and brought to us and to all who believe, new life, love and forgiveness, now and into eternity.

So now, when Jesus calls us to follow Him in Baptism or at a later point in life, He calls us to a life like His that seems contrary to the ways of the world – to win you must lose, and to gain you must surrender. And yet that is precisely the message of the cross. We live in the death of Jesus.

Last week many of you came to our showing of the movie, “Do you believe?” In this scene an EMT is discussing with his wife what will happen to him as a consequence of leading a dying man to the Lord while he was on an emergency call. He is being sued by the man’s wife, and the Firefighters Union is not supporting him since he refuses to apologize and say the incident was a mistake. Bobby’s wife, who is also a Christian, is not happy that he has decided to fight the accusations even though it will come at a significant cost and sacrifice to their family. Take a look

Being a follower of Jesus, hearing his call to faith, and then being faithful means you need to do three things:

**Lose your “claim.”** Following Jesus ultimately means you sacrifice your claim to be your own boss. When we take a stand for Christ, sometimes the only defense we have is the Savior (example of Luther). It’s hard to give up control to someone else. Sacrificing for the greater good can sometimes cost everything. “Losing to find” is so hard to wrap our brains around . . . “letting go of control” gives greater control to the Master.

**Find your joy and contentment in Jesus.** People seeking happiness are often only looking to be personally fulfilled. “How can I be happy?” But Jesus told us the only way to find true joy and contentment is to turn everything over to Him, to surrender our will to His. It’s how we find our truest selves. Christ is the ultimate “fulfilling” of purpose in our hearts and lives.

**Secure your future.** James said faith without action is dead . . . and that kind of superficial faith has no promise for the future we hope for, a future in heaven with Jesus. True, active faith has movement, purpose and direction. It responds to what God has done in Jesus, and it acts to bring others to faith. Church should extend beyond the walls of the building.

Clarence Jordan was a man of unusual abilities and commitment. He had two Ph.D.’s; one in agriculture and one in Biblical Languages. So gifted was he, he could have chosen to do anything he wanted. He chose to serve the poor. In the 1940s, he founded a farm in Americus, Georgia, and called it Koinonia Farm. It was a community for poor whites and poor blacks. As you might guess, such an idea did not go over well in the Deep South of the 1940s.

Ironically, much of the resistance came from good church people who followed the laws of segregation as much as the other folk in town. The town people tried everything to stop Clarence. They tried boycotting him, and slashing workers' tires when they came to town. Over and over, for fourteen years, they tried to stop him.

Finally, in 1954, the Ku Klux Klan had enough of Clarence Jordan, so they decided to get rid of him once and for all. They came one night with guns and torches and set fire to every building on Koinonia Farm but Clarence's home, which they riddled with bullets. And they chased off all the families except one black family which refused to leave. Clarence recognized the voices of many of the Klansmen, and, as you might guess, some of them were church people. Another was the local newspaper's reporter. The next day, the reporter came out to see what remained of the farm. The rubble still smoldered and the land was scorched, but he found Clarence in the field, hoeing and planting.

"I heard the awful news," he called to Clarence, "and I came out to do a story on the tragedy of your farm closing. Clarence just kept on hoeing and planting. The reporter kept prodding kept poking, trying to get a rise from this quietly determined man who seemed to be planting instead of packing his bags. So, finally, the reporter said in a haughty voice, "Well, Dr. Jordan, you got two of them Ph.D.'s and you've but fourteen years into this farm, and there's nothing left of it at all. Just how successful do you think you've been?" Clarence stopped hoeing, turned toward the reporter with his penetrating blue eyes, and said quietly but firmly, "About as successful as the cross. Sir, I don't think you understand us. What we are about is not success but faithfulness. We're staying. Good day." Beginning that day, Clarence and his companions rebuilt Koinonia and the farm is still going strong today.

True faith requires action, movement, sacrifice and response . . . otherwise it's just knowledge. What action do you need to take this week? Perhaps sacrifice something you continue holding on to. Or maybe encourage a friend or family member to keep a commitment to Jesus.

Losing to find, dying to live—it's counterintuitive. But a life of faith in Jesus requires sacrifice. It requires letting go of control and trusting God to handle things.

This week, as you marinate on what it means to find your life by losing it, find some small ways to release control. Maybe you'll save money you could have spent and bless a less fortunate family. Maybe you'll flip off the television and spend some time in the Word. Maybe you'll pray in public over a meal or with a coworker. Die to live.

Next week, we'll take a look at what happens when we do the "wrong thing" when defining moments come our way. May God bless your faith each and every day, and grow in Jesus. Die to self and you will find true gain and discover true and eternal life. In Jesus. Amen.