**UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT**

***Paradoxes Christians Must Live***

***# 1 - Losing Is Gaining***

The world never has, does not now, and never will understand us. Christians and Christianity are strange to the world. Most think us cult-like. That is why Jesus went out of His way to give fair warning before we signed on the dotted line and committed our lives to becoming His disciples. Compared to our love for Jesus we “*hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and our own life also*” (Lk. 14:26). He’s not through yet, you also must “*bear your cross and follow Me*” (Lk. 14:27). And, like the infomercials at 2:00 am, “Wait, there’s more.” He adds this, “*Whoever does not forsake ALL that he has cannot be My disciple*!” (Lk. 14:33). That’s exactly why “*many are called, but few are chosen*” (Matt. 22:14). Are you among the chosen few? I hope so. If so, buckle up, for you are living in an upside down, inside out world. You, dear brother or sister, are a living paradox.

By paradox I am not talking about two people with Ph.d degrees. (sorry, bad joke).

A paradox is a statement that appears contradictory, but when you look closer, you realize it makes sense in a way that you never saw before. For example, “Less is more.” You at first go, “huh?” But upon reflection you begin to see the truth of it. In a debate it is often more powerful to say less, but say it in a very logical, profound way. Less is more. As a kid one of my favorite baseball players was Yogi Berra. He was a walking, talking paradox. His famous head-scratchers are now legendary. “Don't go near the water until you have learned how to swim.” “The future ain’t what it used to be.” “It’s tough to make predictions, especially about the future.” “You can observe a lot by watching.” “Listen up, because I’ve got nothing to say, and I’m only gonna say it once.” (pretty good one for some of my sermons, huh?)

Jesus Christ taught so many lessons by using paradox phrases. If you are going to “get” discipleship, you better put on your thinking cap, strap on your hip waiters, and wade out into deep waters. While the world plays in the kiddie pool and thinks only on the surface, Christians are called to think with God and act like Christ. Bible readers know what happened when God spoke to the world and Christ lived in the world. The world never understood them. Not because they couldn’t, but because they wouldn’t. God’s thoughts and ways are higher than man’s (Isaiah 55:8-9). To follow Christ you must think outside the world’s box, but think inside the Lord’s Bible. By doing so you will be living a paradox. I wish to study five of these with you this week:

1. Losing is gaining.
2. Slavery is freedom.
3. Weakness is strength.
4. Last is first.
5. Serving is leading.

I hope these five studies will help you think on things above, not on earth (Col. 3:1-2).

**Losing Is Gaining**

Text - Matthew 16. Peter had just made the good confession that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God (v.16). Jesus praised him for that statement of faith (v.18). Perhaps minutes later Jesus tells Peter, “*Get behind me Satan, you an offense to me*!” Ugh. What happened? Why was Peter praised one minute, then called Satan the next? Because his thinking was shallow. He thought like the world. Hear Jesus explain it:

*21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

Despite the fact that Christ repeatedly told the apostles of God’s plan to redeem the world through His death and resurrection, they didn’t get it. They were stuck on stupid because they were stuck on the status quo mindset. Jesus knew that had to change, and drastically. Calling Peter “*Satan*” got his undivided attention. It was a wakeup call to get with His program, not the one of the scribes and Pharisees. It was a call to radical revolution! Christianity was to change the world. The future would proclaim Christ’s followers as people “*who have turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6).

Revolution is never easy. Just ask the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. I’ll tell you their story tomorrow. Jesus said, “*if any man desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me*.” Calling yourself a disciple requires discipline… and courage. Revolutionaries are often caught and executed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor, wrote in his classic book *The Cost Of Discipleship*, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” The Nazi’s hung him on April 9, 1945, just 28 days before Germany surrendered.

“*Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it*.” Compromise might save your life, but in doing so you lose your life forever. By riding the fence you can easily jump to the “winning” side when persecution comes. Doing so will leave a mark on you. That mark is 666 (Rev. 13:18). It saves your skin for now but will cost you dearly when the roll is called up yonder.

Jesus had to lose to gain. He must lose His life to gain my life. The Redeemer lost His life to save mine. Peter thought by Jesus losing His life it would be a great defeat. In fact, it was the world’s greatest victory. Now He calls me to do the same. I die to self so that Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20). I lose myself to gain Christ. The losing is temporary. The gaining is eternal. The world doesn’t get that dying is living, that losing is gaining. But we do. That is why the world calls us “*strange*” (I Pet. 4:4), but why God calls us “friend” (Jn. 15:13-15). Let us all take on “*the mind of Christ*” (Phil. 2:5) and so lose ourselves in Him that we become known by the world as “Losers” – but known by God as “Winners.”

Until tomorrow… lose the world, but gain Jesus. That’s a paradox worth pondering.

I love you.

Rick