

February 25, 2024 – Second Sunday in Lent

“World’s Standards vs God’s Standards” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

Norman Vincent Peale, in his book “Power of the Plus Factor, in Christianity Today”, related a story:

Once walking through the twisted little streets of Kowloon in Hong Kong, I came upon a tattoo studio. In the window were displayed samples of the tattoos available. On the chest or arms you could have tattooed an anchor or flag or mermaid or whatever.

But what struck me with force were three words that could be tattooed on one’s flesh: “Born to lose”.

I entered the shop in astonishment and, pointing to those words, asked the Chinese tattoo artist, "Does anyone really have that terrible phrase, ‘Born to lose’, tattooed on his body?"

He replied, "Yes, sometimes." "But," I said, "I just can’t believe that anyone in his right mind would do that."

The Chinese man simply tapped his forehead and said, "Before tattoo on body, tattoo on mind."

Is it this what the Lord Jesus meant when he said “³⁵*For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it*”? (Mark 8:35)

Does he want us to have a tattoo with the word “loser” printed on our arm or forehead?

Well, when we look at the story of the eleven disciples who were close and faithful to our Lord Jesus all the way to the very end of their lives and looking at them through the world’s standards, none of them was a successful person. Who knows but probably there was at least one or two who called or thought of them as “losers”.

They did not accumulate possessions, they did not hold a position of power in the Roman government, they did not command a military army, they did nothing or

possessed anything equal or even close to what you and I would call a successful person. It was all the opposite for those disciples. They left their homes, their occupations, moved out of their own land, left their families behind and suffered all kind of hardships, persecution and insults. They endured hunger, imprisonment, slander, and at the end lost their lives, but according to God standards that was a successful life.

And the Apostle Paul understood and articulated that success when he wrote to the church in Corinth saying:

“We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see---we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. “(2 Corinthians 6:8-10)

To the eyes of people in Biblical times, and to some today, the disciples of our Lord Jesus, including St. Paul, with a “loser” tattoo on their arms, would perfectly describe their lives as servants of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Keith Butler, in the following statement, gives us his thoughts on what measuring up to the world’s standards does to us when he wrote:

“When you start thinking and acting like the world, you begin trying to accumulate all the things the world accumulates. Then you start measuring whether you are a success by the world's standards instead of God's standard. You see, God's standard is not based on success in this world, whether you have three cars, or live in a mansion in the suburbs, or have a college degree, or see your name printed often in the newspaper. With God, none of these things equals success. When you get wrapped up in the world's system and the world's covetousness, then instead of acting upon God's promises to you, you begin to think the world's way. What happens when you do that? You start putting pressure on yourself to obtain the things of this world.”

There is no doubt that the world’s standards are enticing and very appealing, and this is exactly what the Lord Jesus is warning us about in this Gospel.

It is so charming that it becomes so easy to get lost in it, while we don’t even realize it. Just think for a moment on the world’s demands that make our lives revolve around work or employment:

“A survey found that you are going to spend about 150,000 hours of your life working, which is about 40% of your waking hours. The average person spends 46 hours a week at work. If you’re a professional, you spend an average of 52 hours a week working and if you’re a small business owner/operator you work an average of 57 hours a week. The fact is, you’ll spend more time working, commuting to work and thinking about work than you will eating meals and vacations combined in your whole lifetime. Work is a huge part of our lives.”

If to these demands we add those of family, monthly bills, rent, mortgages and so forth, no wonder parents must work two jobs just to get by. There is no time for family, for community involvement, to join and volunteer for a community service group, or participate in a Sunday worship service.

In this kind of social context, what do the following words from Jesus mean to them and to us?

³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? (Mark 8:35-37)

Perhaps, there is something mysterious and worthwhile for all of us in these words from our Lord Jesus, something that the world may not know yet and have not yet discovered.

If we read these words slowly and very carefully reflect upon them, we will learn that in serving the Gospel of our Lord Jesus and having a relationship with Him, there is something in it that enriches our lives here on earth and beyond.

That something perhaps is a mystery to all of us, and it is that something that keep us coming every week to this place to worship God. That something is what compels us to serve our neighbours, to be more generous, to be more willing to lend a helping hand, to be a good Samaritan, to be less and less attached to our possessions and to believe that life is not just about storing treasure on earth but in heaven.

There is no need to tattoo on our arm or forehead the word “loser” when it comes to serve the Lord and His Gospel because we know that in Christ life does not consist of the abundance of possessions, or having a successful life according to world’s standards, but is about storing treasures in heaven by loving God, loving people and all that God has created. **Amen.**

