

A New Life in Christ

So, hello again from Hong Kong, and I trust that you've had a blessed Christmas. Now last week, I focused on the gift of Christmas in the person of Jesus Christ and invited you to claim this free gift. For those who decided to stake their claim and take up this gift, you now have begun your new life in Christ. Those of us who staked that claim years ago can always benefit from a reminder of just what it means to live in Christ, and those of you who have not yet claimed this gift, need to know just what you are missing, so 'A New Life in Christ', which is the title of this message is relevant to all.

Now, first of all, let me tell you that a new life in Christ means that you lose something, but you also gain something. As I explain what you lose and what you gain, it will become clear just what a new life in Christ means.

What You Lose

Let's begin by looking at what you stand to lose, but bear in mind that what you will lose is totally worthless compared to what you gain. Paul was probably the greatest Christian evangelist that has ever lived. However, before he came to know Christ, not only was he an aggressive persecutor of Christians, but he was a Pharisee, which was a high status position to hold in Jewish society, and this attracted all the trappings of success as measured by this world's standards. Now, this is what he said about what he lost after becoming a Christ follower, and I am quoting from the New Living Translation of Philippians 3:8: *Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.*

So, what is this 'garbage' that we lose in becoming a Christ follower? The major contents of this garbage are described now.

Pride

Perhaps the most significant loss we suffer when Christ takes centre stage in our lives, is pride, and believe me, as someone who was once very prideful, I can tell you that this is worth losing. Pride and egotism never give the possessor peace. A life of comparison with others and sensitivity to the slightest criticism is a life of internal turmoil. What's more, from a spiritual standpoint, we all inevitably are 'riding for a fall'. This is because, in order to enable us to lose our pride and egotism, the Lord will ensure that we will fall in order to herald the start of a journey towards Jesus! The Bible clearly states in Proverbs 16 verse 18 (NIV) that: *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

The Illusion of Self-Reliance

We also lose an illusion of self-reliance. Non-Christians will sometimes suggest that Christianity is only for the weak, and I confess that this was my view until I saw highly successful and strong men in Christian leadership positions who were prepared to follow the prayerful leading of the Lord. Now, I'm sure that I am not alone in believing, as I did before I became a Christ follower, that only the weak need the crutch of Christianity. Tell this to Abraham, to Moses, to Samson, to David, to John the Baptist, and, of course, to Jesus. Moving to more modern times, tell this to Christ followers past and present from various walks of life such as Rick Warren, Chuck Norris, George Foreman, John. D Rockefeller, Conrad Hilton, and Novak Djokavic. Needing a crutch? I don't think so.

You may have noted earlier that I did not say that when we come to know Christ we lose our self-reliance, I actually said that we lose our illusion of self-reliance. Now, I've discussed in a previous message that we're actually in a spiritual battlefield, and given this realization, the problem for the non-Christian who thinks he is going his own way and does not heed Christ's guiding hand is conveyed in Proverbs 14:12 (NIV): *There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*

Fear of Man

The natural world seems to be governed by a fear of not fitting in. Much of what natural man, or woman, for that matter, does, is motivated by a desire not to rock the boat, to 'go with the flow' to please the boss, to please friends and so on. At the core of all this is fear of man. The Bible deals with this issue and is very clear on the subject, and this is indicated in Proverbs 29 verse 25 (NIV). This is what it says: *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.* Now, note that fear of man is not just ill-advised, it is a snare - a trap, designed to destroy the individual. It is a dangerous negative force that encourages conformance to the value system of this world, which of course, is the domain of Satan, the 'prince of this world' as he is described by Jesus in John 14 verse 30 (NIV). Fear of man and conformance to man's values actually means conformance to Satan's values and his manipulations!

Control of Our Finances

OK, now we can be deluded into believing that we are in total control of our finances and our financial futures when we are not Christ followers. First however, we need to recognise that financial systems and individual fortunes are here today and can be gone tomorrow. Reliance on money for safety and security allows Satan full reign in our lives. Integrity disappears for the dollar. Lives can also come to an end when the money runs out and it is not unusual to hear of suicides when fortunes are lost. Most significant is the following verse in Luke 18 verse 25 (NIV): *Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go*

through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When the love of money rules, integrity often flees from the scene, hence the verse I have just read.

What You Gain

Now up to now, I've been talking all about losses, so let's now move to the gains derived from following Christ, and I'm going to preface what I say with recognition that the overarching gain is eternal life through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, having recognised that, let's look at some more gains from becoming a Christ follower.

Humility

In a world which is concerned with self-promotion, humility is not a valued commodity. It's actually seen as a form of weakness or just simply false. However, genuine Christian humility relates to the inner knowledge that we are nothing compared to Jesus. Outwardly, we can appear strong and be strong, but inwardly we know that our strength does not come from us but is a gift from the Lord. In recognizing this, the pressure to achieve in our own right and for our own glory is no longer necessary. The reality of existence is that the Lord determines what we do and do not achieve.

David of David and Goliath fame was anything but weak, and he put it this way in Psalm 28 verse 7: *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.*

God-Reliance

Now, as well as humility, we also gain God-reliance. Once we realize that all things come from Him and that He holds our futures in the palm of His hand, the pressure is off and we experience His peace. Of course, as the book of Proverbs states many times, the Lord expects diligence in all that we do, but knowing He controls our destiny brings a peace beyond normal human understanding or experience prior to walking with the Lord. James 1 verse 17 (NIV) reinforces this in the following words: *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

Once we fully grasp the fact that God controls our futures, there's also a certain excitement because there is the 'buzz' of not quite knowing what the future holds coupled with an absolute confidence that whatever it is, it will work for our good. Romans 8:28 (NIV) confirms this as follows: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

God-Centred Courage

We also gain God-Centred courage. This is the courage to stand up for what is right; in other words, to stand up for God's principles even in the face of opposition. We are not called to fear man but to fear God. Interestingly, when we stand up for God, He stands for us and we gain more respect from men than if we had chosen to go with the flow. This inevitably means that we will have people coming against us, but we can only pray that they seek to understand the source of our courage so they can also be blessed in the same way. There is great freedom in knowing that you can abandon fear because you have been released from seeking the approval of man. If you act in a God honouring way in all circumstances, man just cannot determine your fate. Romans 8:31 (NIV) states this clearly: *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

God's Provision

Another important gain is God's provision. I recently heard a wise statement, which really does capture the essence of God's provision, which is contrary to what we would expect in the natural world. One reason for this is that God sometimes chooses to display his power in a counter intuitive fashion. Now this is the statement: *"God's provision is based on what you give and not what you save."*

Now, I'm not preaching what is sometimes called prosperity gospel here which suggests that God wants all his people to be rich. I don't believe this to be the case, and there is no solid Biblical foundation to indicate that God's people all are destined to be materially wealthy. In fact, Proverbs 30, verses 8 through 9 (NIV) would seem to indicate that extreme poverty or riches are not especially desirable. The proverb states this: *Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.*

Nevertheless, I am personally aware of what I have come to call the 'five loaves and two fishes effect' that derives from the Biblical account of Jesus feeding 5000 followers with just five loaves and two fishes and still having surplus when everyone had eaten. In the finances of a Christian, giving in the form of tithes and offerings with a 'glad heart', results in a supernatural activity that appears to expand one's finances to accommodate our needs. This is what is meant by the statement earlier, namely that *'God's provision is based on what you give and not what you save.'* This phenomenon will be explored in detail at another time, but suffice it to say that, all we have by whatever means we acquire it, is by God's Grace. It is God that enables us to earn income because all resources are His and all provision is from Him.

What is particularly encouraging to the Christian is the truth conveyed in the following famous passage from Matthew 6: verses 25 to 30 (NIV) *Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not*

life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Conclusion

Let me conclude: A new life in Christ consists of the abandonment of pride, self-reliance, fear of man and control of our finances. These actually are all aspects of Satan's deception and are nothing more than an illusion and are actually worthless in comparison to what is gained by living in Christ. The new life consists of humility based on the fact that we are, to take a Biblical phrase, 'filthy rags' in comparison to Jesus Christ. We are actually nothing without Him but we *can do all things through Christ* which is an extract from Philippians chapter 4 verse 13 (NIV). Similarly, it becomes evident that in our new life, we are God reliant and we have embarked on an exciting journey with God at the helm. The analogy is of Jesus Christ at the helm of the vessel of our lives and our task is merely to diligently keep rowing. Our new life consists of replacing fear of man with God-centred courage, which means we are able to stand up for what is Biblically correct in a crazy world. We will not be popular with man but we will be popular where it counts, that is with God.

Finally, our new life involves casting off the delusion that we control our finances or anything else. In reality, our money could be gone tomorrow, so could our jobs and so could our health. We are deluded into thinking we have control of our lives in this world instead of understanding that all of our security is in Christ Jesus.

The ingredients of the new life we have chosen to discuss this week, when summed, result in a peace that, to quote Philippians 4:7 (NIV): *transcends all understanding*. It's certainly a quality of peace which cannot be acquired in the natural world. This is what the new Christian has to look forward to, what the long standing Christian needs to recall, and what those who did not claim their gift, are missing. If you fall into this last category, and you want to start a new life in Christ, please email admin@thelittlechurchworld.org. We are ready and waiting to help you.

Now, it's been a pleasure to be with you again this week, and I now look forward to being with you this time next week. Now, until then, God Bless you and have a blessed and very happy New Year, goodbye.

Discussion Questions

1. Pride is mentioned 46 times in the Bible compared with the term 'murder' which is mentioned 37 times and 'adultery' which is mentioned 33 times. The number of times a particular word is mentioned in the Bible is an indication of the importance of the issues described to the Christian faith and pride is high on the list? Why do you think this is the case?
2. List words that describe the value system of this world and then compile a further list that describes the value system of the Christ follower. Which of the two lists are likely to give you the most peace in this world and why?
3. Why are non-Christians so reluctant to give up their supposed self-reliance and exchange it for God-reliance?
4. In the context of 'fear of man', imagine you join a conversation in which there are non-Christians and the subject is 'gay rights'. You join in the conversation and offer the point of view that Biblically, it is clear that homosexuality is wrong. You might quote Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 and Romans 1:26-27. What is the likely reaction of others in the conversation and how will you respond?
5. I believe that Jesus is often depicted as a 'bearded lady'! What I mean by this is that the various artists show a feminine soft-faced looking Jesus whose only masculine characteristic is the beard. Similarly there seems to be a general perception of Jesus that his character fits this feminine depiction i.e., a rather weak and insipid type character. How accurate is this picture and what evidence can you bring to the table to show the accuracy or inaccuracy of this picture?