

Sermon, March 13, 2022
Philippians 3:17-4:1 & Luke 13:31-35
“Kingdom Living: Seeing with Clear Eyes”
Rev. Dr. Brian Jones, Senior Pastor



My cousin sent me a picture a couple of months ago of my Uncle. This is my Uncle Estill, my father's older brother. I never met him, he was older than my dad, and I had only seen one photo of him before this one. I never met him because he died on the beaches of Normandy during the D Day invasion.

Because of that connection, I watched with great interest the beginning of the 1998 film, "Saving Private Ryan". It begins with maybe 20 minutes, perhaps longer, of the invasion of Normandy. And it is horrific. I watched and thought about the sacrifice they made these, in many cases, young men - some of them barely out of their teens. It's an incredible act of service.

If you've seen the movie, you know that in many ways it's a movie about Sacrifice. A woman has lost four sons in the war. There is a fifth son still in the war. The powers that be decide it's enough sacrifice for one family. They send a small group led by Tom Hanks to find the last son Private Ryan.

Many of those sent to find Ryan die along the way. Ryan holds one of the men who came to get him. The man's dying words to Ryan are simply this "Earn this". The movie then cuts to the end scene with a now elderly Ryan. He stands next to a gravestone of that same man. He turns to his wife and almost whispers, tell me I am a good man. Tell me I've lived a good life. Tell me I was worth it.

Of course, she assures him that he has led a good life and is a good man. But why? Why did he live a good life? How did he become a good man. Surely those dying words, "earn this" must have rang in his ears all of his adult life. We are led to believe he became a good man or certainly a better one because someone thought he was worth it. Someone decided to pay a great cost that he might be more than he was. Or become more than he ever dreamed.

Does that sound familiar? It's the message of the Gospel, isn't it? Now, it isn't a complete parallel, by any means. I'm sure it was not the intention of the director or writer. But that's the thing about the Gospel. We were born yearning for it. Our hearts desire the truth of the Gospel, and it will come to us in bits and parts, sometimes in the most unexpected of places.

But it is the message of the Gospel. That Jesus would look down at us, see us in the battle of sin wounded by our pride and transgression and the cruelty of this world, and decide we were worth saving. That we were worth so much that He would pay any cost so that we might become better, so that we might be better, so that we might be more than we have ever dreamed we would be. Jesus sees value in us where even we can't see it and paid the cost. He decided we are worth it.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he writes "we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus paid the cost because He not only thought we were worth saving but so that we could be citizens of His Kingdom." That's our Lenten theme. We are kingdom citizens, and we will spend Lent together asking ourselves what does it mean to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

Paul says Jesus counted the cost and gave Himself for us not so that we could just be good, or better than we are, but that we would be transformed by His grace and be imitators of Christ. Not imitators as a cheap knock off or someone putting on a show, but really someone else underneath the façade. More like taking on the character of someone you admire or someone you are close to. The closer we are to Jesus, the more like Jesus we will become in our actions, in our attitudes, and in our thought life.

And in how we see others. If you go back and read this passage of Scripture, Paul does speak out against those he calls the enemies of the cross. I tell you about them, he writes even with tears. Paul looks at those who do not believe, sometimes even enemies of the cross, the enemies of Jesus, and instead of having anger, he sees them through tears. Why? Because he imitates Christ. Paul knows, better than anyone, at one time, he, too, was an enemy of the cross. And Jesus looked at him not with condemnation

but through tears. Paul knows that Jesus decided Paul even in his sin was worth the cost to save him. Paul knows that if he is to imitate Christ, he ought to be looking through tears at those who are his enemy. He ought to look at them with compassion. And he ought to live in such a way that shouts out to them *you are worth every sacrifice*. I came in order for you to know you are loved and that Jesus can change your life.

My fellow citizens of the Kingdom of heaven, let's be honest with one another. If you look at the church across the globe, we as the church here in America, we have an embarrassment of riches. We have resources and money that astound most churches throughout the world. And that's Ok as long as we understand God has blessed us so that we might bless the world. But it might be easy for us to assume because we have so much that we lack nothing.

But as I look at the church in our culture, if there is one thing we lack, it's an inability, or perhaps a refusal, to see those who don't know God through a veil of tears. If there is something we lack, it is perhaps a lack of compassion for the lost. It's easier to judge than to have compassion. It's easier to pigeonhole someone rather than getting to know them. It's easier to pass people off rather than invest in their lives. And then we wonder why we don't see churches growing as they did in the time of Paul.

My fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God, this has nothing to do with resources or demographics, it has everything to do with our unwillingness to see others with compassion, to look at someone and say *You are worth every sacrifice I can make, you are worth whatever it is to let you know God loves you*. That can make a difference. The lost need someone who is willing to say *you are worth it*.

To be a citizen of the Kingdom of God means to find an intimacy with Christ so that we see the world, that we see others, as He does. We will not bring anyone into the kingdom of God by a lack of compassion. We will only show them the truth of the Gospel by showing them how much they are loved when the world tells them the exact opposite.

So how do we do that? It ought not be that difficult if you concentrate on a greater intimacy with Jesus, and we should be doing that. In Lent, we will begin to see others through a veil of tears and compassion. But in this season of Lent, I want you to examine your heart, ask God to reveal to you where your hearts is. Do you have a compassion for the lost? Do you see them through a veil of tears? Ask God to forgive you for the times your heart was hardened against someone because they didn't measure up to your standards.

Ask God to rein in and soften our speech in person and perhaps behind the keyboard and computer screen. You don't have to do much research to see Christians acting un-Christ-like to people when disagreeing with them. We can do great damage with our words, and we ought to ask God to rein them in and learn to speak with compassion toward others.

Ask God to begin to reveal to you the people He has brought into your life who need to know they are

worth it. Who need to know although they have done nothing to deserve it that you are willing to count the cost and spare no expense in letting them know they are loved. You might be surprised who it might be. It could be a stranger. One of our guests who join us for lunch. It might be someone in your home who has never been experienced an extravagance of compassion and made to feel they are worth the cost.

My fellow citizens of the kingdom of God, the world and the lost are worth it. We can change their lives. For if we don't, then, who will? Amen.