

Jesus Greatest Gamble

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This is one of my favorite portions of scripture. We actually get to eavesdrop as Jesus prays to his Father. Now let me ask you something...as Bob read this portion of scripture, John 17, what is this prayer primarily about? Its striking. Jesus is about to go to the cross

He prays, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave to do." Then he describes that work.

What does Jesus consider to be his work?

Was it his great sermons? His great miracles? Bringing the dead back to life? Feeding 5,000 with scraps of bread and fish? Calming the sea? Walking on water?

No. He doesn't mention any of that. Instead he talks repeatedly about this small group of men God had given him out of the world.

The disciples were the work God had given to him. The relationship he had with them was quite literally his life. He had invested everything in them. And when you read through this prayer you can't help but sense the intensity of affection that Jesus had for this quirky band of scruffy guys that he had spent more time with than anyone else – teaching them, showing them, living with them.

He was banking on them now, and asking God to help them as he was leaving this earth because it was up to them now to carry on and be responsible for sharing the gospel with the world.

And did you catch the part where Jesus prays *for you in here?* (**Highlight text – I pray for those who will believe in me through their word**)

That's a beautiful part right there. Jesus knew that many would believe after these disciples had spread the word and were long gone...and he includes us today right in here; we too are his disciples, called to spread his message and **There is no PLAN B** on this one.

Either we spread the gospel through word, and through action, in Jesus' name or it doesn't get done. That's Jesus' great gamble.

Now I don't gamble. I've never gambled. But my hairdresser does. And she told me the other day that 10 years ago she had gone to a very cheap machine and gambled just a little bit of money and pulled the lever and....

Lo and behold she hit the jackpot and won 20.000!

And I told her, you are just like Jesus. And she looked at me sort of oddly. She knows I'm a pastor and because I'm a woman she thinks it's the funniest thing. She's Armenian and Greek orthodox, and she introduces me to everybody who works in the salon as the pastor all the time and I get all kinds of different reactions – its really funny.

So when I told her she was just like Jesus for gambling she told me that Jesus didn't gamble. And I said, "Oh yes he did. He gambled on us. He put all his money on his followers, believing that they would spread his word and his love to people in the same way that he had."

I was practicing this sermon on her but I don't think she understood what I was talking about because then she needed to go outside and have a cigarette. I was miserable failure as a witness...

But my point?

1. Following Jesus is not just simply *learning more about him* – its living it out and making it count

Has anyone ever heard of Michael Nicholson? (CAN YOU GET AN IMAGE) He is 71 years old and has of this past year, earned 29 degrees. He is now pursuing his 30th.

He has one bachelor's degree, two associate's degrees, 22 master's degrees, three specialist degrees and one doctoral degree. He is currently working on a master's degree in criminal justice.

"I would like to get to 33 or 34. I'm almost there," he told ABC News. One of his professors said "It's a unique thing to do, but it is almost bizarre. Some people collect animals and he collects tassels."

Really? What good does it do to amass information and not use it?

Learning about our faith is a great thing - the immense love of God, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the resurrection power of the gospel, the call to share our faith and be a light in the world, the command to forgive, to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly – its such great stuff.

And its deep and generative and inspiring. And we can learn more and more and more. We can go to Bible studies, and church, and retreats and keep feeding ourselves with information about God...that's great...

But after a certain point we are meant to use that information to live differently, radically differently. Not just to avoid bad things; sometimes I think not swearing, and not doing drugs or abusing substances is what we think Christianity is all about. Hardly.

Christianity is not just about avoiding bad things; its about doing amazing life changing things and trusting God enough to take risks in our faith to make a difference in the world.

We are meant to use the information of the power of the gospel to really touch the people we come in contact with every day. In the workplace, in the stores, at home, at school – wherever you are the gospel is relevant and needs to be shared.

People long for it, and need it.

If you don't do it, there's no plan B.

2. If you are a follower of Jesus, God can use you, no matter who you are

The thing is here that what Jesus had to work with, those 12 guys, 11 guys really that he put all his money on - was not that great.

It wasn't like he had 11 CEO's, or diplomats, or even 11 scholars or engineers. These men were not stellar folks. Great artists depict the disciples as looking very holy and refined, but they weren't much when Jesus prayed this prayer that day...and took that great gamble...that they would be his messengers to the world

You have **Matthew** who everyone hated because he was a **tax collector** and a cheat.

You have **Thomas** who is known as a doubter and also very cynical. There's a part in scripture where Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem and Thomas says essentially, "*Oh great, let's go with him so we can die with him.*" Total **cynic**.

Then there's **James and John** who think they are better than everyone else and who want to be on the right hand and on the left of Jesus when they die. It makes the other disciples really mad at them. So **grandiose!**

And then there's **Peter** who is a hot head – impulsive and gruff – and who curses a lot. He just does. We've cleaned up the text in the scripture but if translated accurately, Peter doesn't have a clean mouth. A fisherman...gruff and crass.

If you think God can't use you to spread the gospel, cause you are not good enough...think again.

Heavyweight boxing champion Mohammed Ali said one time..." **If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread, they can sure make something out of you.**

There are days when you might feel like moldy bread in the kitchen of the Kingdom... Kind of smelly and useless...Don't give up! God promises fruitfulness and usefulness to all who hang in there and continue to grow in Him.

And if he could use those eleven disciples, to spread the message of the gospel, to the world, then he can use you too.

3. Take the plunge

Often after a message like this when we are talking about acting on our faith

Bringing Jesus into every aspect of our life

Sharing his message, making him known in word and deed – reaching out in radical ways

People ask me "How do I know for sure this is where I ought to go, or this is what I ought to do?"

How can I be guaranteed that if I say yes to God's nudging, leading, that there will be no risk, no hurt, no failure, no criticism, no pain?"

Well, let me tell you, it doesn't work that way.

We go by faith. We don't go by sight. We don't wait for guaranteed outcomes that we can see.

And unfortunately when you follow Jesus, there is suffering involved

That's why Jesus said, "**Take up your cross and follow me.**"

That's why Jesus said, "**In the world you will have tribulation.**"

It is guaranteed. But he also said, "**Be of good cheer! I have overcome the world.**"

So when we see a need, and sense the push of the Spirit of God, we say yes and we go.

No guarantees that everything is going to work out just perfectly.

It didn't work out with no suffering for the disciples. Bartholomew and Peter were crucified upside down – Peter because he requested it because he wasn't worthy to die right side up the way Jesus did.

One of the James was beheaded (the son of Zebedee), the other James was stoned

John was exiled on an island and died there

Have I talked you out of following Jesus yet? Jesus never promised that we wouldn't have struggles and suffer for the gospel in this life.

We will have tribulation. We will experience pain.

The goodness of God and the evil in this world are like oil and water

They don't mix; and when we go as emissaries of light, we can get hit hard

But if I don't go when the Holy Spirit calls me to go, if I don't risk, if I don't try, **if I don't say yes, I will never have the delight of partnering with the Lord in doing something wonderful. I will miss out on the joy of taking that leap of faith, and watching God work**

Jesus took a gamble on William Booth (IMAGE) nudging him to help the poor. William Booth said YES to God that is why the Salvation Army exists today. It was tough getting that institution started – no easy road – but think of all the people who have been helped and healed there down through the years long after his death

Jesus took a gamble on Jordan Seng (IMAGE) , pastor of Blue Water Mission Church in Honolulu, and Jordan and some of his people said YES to God and took the plunge to help girls who victims of sex trafficking... it's a huge industry over there – and it was extremely dangerous and taxing to get something started to help them. But now theres a place for them to go and scores of girls have been saved because of it.

Jesus took a gamble on Andre Chapman (IMAGE)...Its because Andre Chapman said yes to God that Unity care, right here in San Jose exists today. Andre Chapman was making a ton of money in a high profile corporation – he gave his testimony just last week and I heard it - he had an experience in church.

The Lord made it very clear to him that he needed to take a risk, get out of his current job, and help kids on the streets.

So he started Unity care, and it wasn't easy.

There were a lot of challenges.

But today it is thriving and hundreds of at risk youth have been helped because he was willing to say YES and take the plunge.

That's radical discipleship. That's bringing faith from the church to the streets. **There is no plan B if we don't go.**

We have someone right here in our congregation who is bringing his faith from the church to the streets and into the work place... and helping kids in a big way too in Jesus' name.
He doesn't just sing, he can talk as well,

I'd like to ask Bill Pierce to come up and share what's happening in his school as he shares Christ there. It takes a lot of patience, and its a big challenge...but I was inspired by his story, and I think you will be too...

(Bill Pierces story....I end in prayer and transition to Rancho)