

Sept. 4 Sermon – Reshape Your Life

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1-4 [potter & rework] & **Luke 14:25-33**, [cost of being a disciple]

I based my sermon title on the scripture from Jeremiah. He was a great prophet in decadent times, and later in life he struggled with self-pity, fear and depression.

Have you ever sat brooding, in a black mood, wondering why life has to be so difficult?

Wishing you could just start over?

I think at some point we've all had a day, or a week or a month like that. You hate your job, you can't seem to get along with your spouse, your financial life is a mess, your kids despise you – even your own face in the mirror disgusts you. You've lost sight of all your dreams and feel nothing but dissatisfaction. All you know is- you don't want to continue like you are.

Something has to be done. Well, there's only one intelligent thing to do – open your Bible!

God has an answer to this problem as he has for every other problem you could face in your life. After asking why you didn't think to consult him sooner, The first thing God is likely to show you is:

you need help.

Entrepreneurs usually learn this lesson when their first venture fails. Instead of giving up, they seek advice from those who succeeded so they can pinpoint and correct their mistakes. If they are wise, they seek God's help, before going out to try again. When they realize that the failure stemmed from some move that can be corrected, there is hope for success if they make a second attempt. However, if they let their ego rule and stubbornly refuse to admit *they* had any part in the failure, God will not help them, and the subsequent ventures will also fail. We must repent and humble ourselves before the Lord. If you think you are blameless, that it's totally your spouse's fault, or your boss' fault, ask God to examine your heart and show you whether you have anything that needs to be brought to light. This is what David did, when he prayed in Psalm 139, "Search me God, and know my heart; ...See if there is any offensive way in me..." We can be totally blind to our own culpability. Sometimes those negative remarks that our spouse or boss throws at us in anger are actually true - a message from God. But once you admit your faults and repent, then don't just sit there in self-condemnation.

You need an infusion of HOPE: Accept the fact that God has forgiven you, thank Him for it, then pick up your Bible and Start reading at Jeremiah 18, v.1-4.

Jeremiah was sent to visit a potter's workshop. When he walked in, he saw that the potter had messed up the piece he'd been working on, rather like you've messed up your life. But rather than sit there ranting about it and berating himself, the potter simply took the ruined piece and formed it into another pot, reshaping it to suit his desire. God told Jeremiah, "Can I not do this with you?...Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." This passage reminds us that when we think we've botched our lives and our situation beyond our ability to fix it, God, as our creator, has the power to reshape things, to rescue our lives from the ash heap. God can bring hope into man's most hopeless situation. Paul tells us in Romans 5:21 that God's grace rules by means of righteousness, leading us to eternal life through Jesus Christ. Ask Him to reshape YOUR life. Only a fool believes himself wiser than his creator. Ask God to save you from yourself.

If you want lasting results, if you truly want to leave your old life behind, it's imperative to

Create a new identity: No, I'm not talking about buying a new passport off the dark web, or

going into witness protection. There's a better way. Turn to Luke 14 for Jesus' 3-step program to reshape your life.

Jesus was addressing the mobs of groupies who followed him around while he was teaching. Some were just looking for free food, others just wanted to keep up with the latest developments to amp up their twitter and Instagram following. A select few of those following Jesus, really wanted to feed their souls. They hungered for the hope he offered: hope of closeness to God, hope of something more satisfying than the bitter and barren lives they were living. Like you, they wanted life to be MORE, and being a disciple of Jesus seemed the way to get it. Changing your identity from farmer, or fisherman, or accountant to disciple of Jesus Christ requires more than just new business cards or a new Linked In profile. It means seeing a totally different 'you' in the mirror. As a disciple of Jesus, **you make a conscious decision to put God first in your life, before all other claims on you.** That's Step 1 in the 3-step program.

That's what Jesus was trying to tell these people when he said, "if anyone comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yet even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple." Now, when you're in a real black mood, you may hate your whole family and even yourself, but Jesus is not talking about the American concept of hate. Rather he means that the affection you feel for them pales in comparison to the love you have for him. No obligation to them will stop you from doing whatever God demands of you. Remember the gentleman who wanted to follow Jesus and just wanted Jesus to excuse him until he had first buried his father who'd just died? Did Jesus say, Go ahead – join me when you're done? No, he said let the dead bury the dead. It sounds callous but it illustrated that Jesus will not accept divided loyalties of any kind. If God calls you to go to India and minister to the poor, you cannot refuse to go because your kids don't want to change schools! Seriously though, putting God first in every area of life will, by itself, help clean up many of your other messes. For example, putting God first in your marriage will hopefully mean you pray together; you listen to & address each other's concerns before they become grounds for divorce. You place your entire family in God's hand, praying instead of worrying. Family ground rules include respect, forgiveness and reverence for God's word. As you become used to putting God first, it is only natural to progress into step 2.

Step 2: Write-off old assets. Ditch the Ouija board, give away the trashy novels or girlie magazines. Cancel most of your social media accounts and club memberships or prepare to be cancelled by their management. If you are changing your identity, people who welcomed the old you will have no interest in your new self. Because we usually like people who are like us, it follows that changing into someone NOT like us is asking for rejection. Jesus compares it to a contractor getting ready to build a building. It's important that he assesses the cost up front, so as not to be publically embarrassed later if expenses exceed his credit line.

In his second example, Jesus compares the disciple wannabe to a general considering an attack on an enemy who outnumbers him. Rather than rashly attack and be humiliated in defeat, he would negotiate for peace. Likewise, when you start putting Jesus first in ALL situations in your life, some friends will find it unnatural and off-putting. They may mock your overt piety. The invitations to weekend trips to Vegas will dry up. Friends who seemed witty when you were both drinking suddenly seem silly & shallow when you're sober. Your golf buddies may tire of you inviting them to church or refusing to look the other way when they move their ball out of the rough so they can win a bet. Even your kids may be unhappy with the new you at first. Putting Jesus at the center of your life will change the way you spend your

time, the type of media you watch (or let your children watch) and the way you evaluate success. It will destroy some relationships, but it will bring new people into your life who compensate for what was lost. Jesus says, if you're cool with this, if you're serious about creating a new you, about being my disciple, go on to step 3.

Step 3: Create an irrevocable trust. In v.33 Jesus declares, "none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." At first glance, it sounds like the call of a cult leader – transfer your millions to me and my church, then you will prove your commitment and we'll let you join. But it's not at all what Jesus means. HE has no need of your money, nor is money what he seeks. It is your complete devotion and willingness to obey that are important to Jesus. For most people, money is a major focus of their idolatry. A willingness to 'sell all you own and follow Jesus' is a good test of sincerity as it was with the rich young man in Matthew 19:22. He wanted his creature comfort and his prosperity more than he wanted to be a disciple. Well, you say, "I am not in that tax bracket. I'm just getting by now so giving up my possessions is no big deal. I'll give it all to my wife and let her deal with it." Okay, You're beginning to realize that our God is a *loving* God, a generous God, who wants to bless you, not deprive you. But he's a jealous god too. Is there something else you cling to, something or someone that gives you a greater feeling of security than knowing Jesus? Your education? Your reputation? Your talent? Do you still feel that desire to boast of what YOU achieved rather than give God the credit he deserves for every good thing in you life? Let's face it, none of these things will get you the fulfillment you crave unless you put them in the hands of Jesus. When Jesus says, 'give up your possessions', he means *give up your very self, to the point that there is no I, for I exist only in Jesus.* Jesus wants to create an irrevocable trust – all the skills, the people or things you used to rely on to get you through each day, to bring you recognition, to rescue you in emergencies, all those are given away or dedicated to Him. You recognize that everything in your life, from people to material goods you owe to God's grace. Your sense of a separate self is erased and replaced by a vision of Him in you. He wants your full and unconditional trust. Even when your prayers seem to go unanswered, even when his commands seem ridiculous in human eyes. No matter what happens, you turn to Jesus first for rescue, for wisdom, for instructions, for resources or for comfort. No turning back. It's a serious, lifetime commitment.

So, are you ready to sign up? How well has it been working doing things YOUR way? Do you enjoy being stressed out? Worried? Have you realized yet that you'll keep ending up in different versions of the same mess until you choose to hand your life and your family over to Jesus? You may have wondered how Peter, Andrew, James and John could just walk away from their fishing business without looking back when Jesus called them. Their souls recognized that Jesus offered a life far superior to anything they'd ever be able to do on their own.

Friend, it's YOUR life; you have to decide what standards you'll adopt, what example you set for your kids, and what legacy you'll leave. In the days of judgment, when Jesus opens up the cupboard, what kind of vessel will bear your name? God often has a better destiny planned for us than we could plan ourselves. Let yourself be shaped by Jesus. Sign on to new hope and peace in this life followed by eternal rewards in paradise. God has made with us a NEW COVENANT and God is incapable of being unfaithful. Don't spit in His eye by refusing to do your part.

- Create a new identity for yourself- one that aligns with God's view of you as a born again believer. Every day say out loud, "I am the righteousness of God in Christ." The

Holy Spirit is working in me to make me more like Jesus." Let Jesus transform you from the inside out. The Holy Spirit is our helper – follow his advice.

- Let go of ungodly people and of any pursuits that tempt you to stray from what Jesus has told you to do. Don't drink the tainted water of the current culture, it's filled with sewerage. Instead turn to Jesus and quench your thirst with his living water.
- Finally, trust that you are loved just as you are. You serve a loving God, who sent his son to save YOU. He is a just and generous god who has a purpose for your life that only YOU can fulfill- if you will just step back and let Him lead.

LET US PRAY:

Precious Jesus,

After your death and resurrection you sent us the Holy Spirit to remind us of your words and to help us meet the challenges we face this side of eternity. Still, in our arrogance, we persist in trying to muddle through on our own, putting our will before yours, and forgetting that you have more to offer than we can ever achieve without you. Renew our minds, Lord, to correct our thinking. Bend our wills to yours. And reshape our lives to serve your purpose and bring glory to your name. AMEN