

**“Uncomfortable: How far are you willing to follow Jesus?”
“Till Death Do Us Part”**

The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Oftentimes, when the church does a survey and asks about preaching and worship, one of the main things that people ask for is that the Bible might be made practical for their life. They want it to be understandable. They want to be able to see how it connects with their daily living as they seek to maneuver through life. How does the Bible help us to deal with challenges? It makes a lot of sense for normal everyday Christians to be concerned about these things.

The Bible not just one book, it's actually 66 books. And it contains the stories of God and God's people. It deals with human stuff – war, peace, politics, societal ills, ethics, death, life, and our journey with God. It's a magnificent story of God's love for his people. And for Christians it all centers on the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The big question for the first disciples was “Who is Jesus?” In a previous section of Matthew Peter answers that question. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah or Christ.

Now, there's another question, a second question as important as the first. “How is Jesus the Messiah”? Jesus tells the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, undergo great suffering at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed, and on the third day rise again. The Messiah must suffer and die. And for the first-century Jewish person like the disciples, the words suffering and Messiah don't go together. They would be considered an oxymoron. Two words put together that are exact opposites. Like civil war, jumbo shrimp, or peaceful riot. Jesus is telling his disciples that his death is the will of God. It is necessary that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer and die.

Jesus is recounting words first said by the prophet Isaiah who foreshadowed the Messiah's death 700 years earlier.

- 53:4 Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us
whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
- ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Suffer and die!! Peter is horrified by the suggestion. “God forbid, not you!” Peter attempts to correct Jesus.

Early church father Origen suggested that when Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan,” what he actually meant was, “Peter, your place is behind me, not in front of me. It's your job to follow me in the way I choose, not to try to lead me in the way YOU would like me to go.”

A disciple's place is to follow Jesus, not to patronize him. It is to obey, not to correct, to believe Jesus is who he says he is and for you to become who he instructs you to become, no matter how uncomfortable that may make us feel. Even the best disciples can make mistakes. Rocks can become stumbling blocks.

Not to follow Jesus in his mission is to be against him and his purpose in the same way that Satan was. Remember, it was the devil who tempted Jesus in the wilderness to give up who he was and instead follow him.

But Jesus will not be a push over; he is clear in his purpose and his mission and will not be dissuaded even by his closest disciple. The human concerns of power, success, and status are not as important as service, generosity, and caring says Jesus. He will live for it and he will die for it.

And if that's how you want your life to be, a life lived for your family, for your friends, for your community, for your church, and for your country, get behind Jesus and follow him. He will show you the way, the truth, and the life worth living.

But understand, it is not an easy road. He makes that clear to the disciples. They will have their crosses to bear as well. You'll have to set down your desire for prestige and influence, money and consumerism, so you can take up the cross and its values of self-sacrifice, humility and love.

And following Jesus is not enforced as we heard in our children's message. He doesn't scream at you for compliance. He doesn't make you do anything. It's an invitation to live like him, to deny yourself to serve others. When we follow Jesus, we experience true freedom from that which would enslave us.

A German pastor who fought against the Nazis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said that discipleship is not a confession of belief, but obedience. It is following. Jesus bids us to come and die. To die to self, to be bound to him in community, so that we can truly live! Don't just admire Jesus, follow Jesus. And our following centers on love.

Paul in his letter to the Romans offers guidelines for how Christians are to center our lives in love. He shares these wonderful attributes of love.

- First: love is genuine. It's real, it's honest, it's not fake.
- Make it your way of life. There is too much evil and hatred in the world; be different from the world and its values.

I'm reminded of a chorus from Bob Dylan's song *Gotta Serve Somebody*.

But you're gonna to have to serve somebody,
yes
Indeed you're gonna have to serve
somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the

Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

Serve Jesus

- Let yourself love and be loved. Paul calls this "mutual affection". Love requires us to be open to the love and then the potential pain of loss.
- Honor people. Respect people. The hardest thing for me during these times in which we are living is seeing the lack of respect for our fellow human beings, whether it's the police, protesters or politicians. Christian living is to try to "outdo each other in showing honor." The persons you may malign have all been created in the image of God and loved by him. Remember that!
- Love extravagantly, generously, passionately with voice, thought, and action for your neighbor.
- Strive to be like Jesus. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer."
- Care about your friends and the stranger you don't even know. Hospitality is a virtue in every major culture and religion. If we forget about caring for each other, we lose our very humanity.
- Show empathy. We are social animals. We are best together. Seek to understand what a person is going through. Listen, care, support them in their needs.
- Promote peace. Promote peace in your homes, in your church, in your community, in the streets. The answer to riots on the streets is not to go into those streets with violent intent, but instead with love. "Don't repay evil for evil."
- Be humble. Don't react to everything you hear. Think for yourself. Seek wisdom rather than knee jerk reaction. God gave

us more developed brains, so we don't have to react to every situation like a snake.

- Be good person. Live right. Be at peace within yourself and in your interactions with others and especially with those you consider to be your enemies.
- Remember God is your judge, so you don't have to judge others. Be open to forgiveness and reconciliation and redemption. Let people say of you "He (or she) loved God and loved people."

Brothers and sisters, each of us has a journey to make and the free will to travel it. There are choices to be made. Some will be made good and some bad.

Jesus showed the world God's love for you and for me. It meant suffering, sacrifice, and ultimately death. To those who follow him he promised a similar path, but that path also brings us life, resurrection hope, peace, and yes, love.

It begins by being a little uncomfortable and following Jesus.

Amen,

Don't just listen to the Sermon...Ponder how you can live it!

Use these questions as a starting point to dive deeper into the sermon each week. Can be used individually, with family and friends, or with your Life-group!

Points to ponder

1. If you could predict your death, what would you say?
2. How can suffering be redemptive?
3. What does your "cross" look like?
4. Paul gives a number of actions (verbs) related to love in Romans 12.9-21. Which ones resonate most with you?
5. Which ones are the hardest to do?

6. What does "overcoming evil with good" look like today?