

life group study guide

April 9, 2017

Things I Wish Jesus Never Said

Week 7: What if Jesus asks me to do something difficult?

“Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ He answered, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ The Lord said to him, ‘Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.’ But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”

-Acts 9:10-17

This event between Ananias and Paul happened only a few chapters after the first recorded martyr of Christianity, Stephen. When faced with a mob that was angry over his proclamation of the faith, Stephen was stoned, and a younger Paul had been in attendance. It’s quite possible that Ananias, who lived in a time when the budding Christian movement was being ousted from the Jewish synagogues, was aware of what happened to Stephen and afraid that Paul would instigate a similar event in his own life.

Early Problems

Paul, however, devoted his life to Christ and lived through that very fate that Ananias feared would be his own. And while Paul spread the gospel more than any known individual, the following centuries saw great peril for Christians. To bolster their faith, popular stories were written about some of the earliest martyrs. Take the following for instance:

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- Thecla (from *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*): a young virgin who, upon being influenced by Paul, devotes her life to Christ and is always seemingly rescued by miracles
 - o Interestingly enough, this tale contains the only known description of the apostle Paul (though it's not known how truthful it was)
 - o "“he was a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting, and he had large eyes and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long, and he was full of grace and mercy; at one time he seemed like a man, and at another time he seemed like an angel.”"

- Perpetua and Felicitas (from *The Passion of Saint Perpetua, Saint Felicitas and Their Companions*): Perpetua had a newborn child while her maid, Felicitas, was pregnant when they were jailed and eventually martyred for their faith

- Polycarp (from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*): an old man flees to the countryside to avoid the persecution, but makes no fuss and is martyred upon being found

First Question: Would you be willing to die for your faith, knowing that it would leave your children unprotected? Is it noble to die for your faith, or better to live and serve God longer on Earth?

Problems From Within

As the Middle Ages started coming to a close, the Christian Church (at least in the West) began to face a lot of internal struggles, the most notable being incredible corruption among the clergy, as well as a restriction of the scriptures to only those same clergy. From this disorder, Martin Luther appeared and began translating the Bible into the common tongue of the people while also arguing against Church corruption. When brought to trial for many of his ideas, he was ordered to recant. However, he refused and famously told his persecutors, “I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen.”

Second Question: Is it noble to risk one's life for the sake of doctrine? What if the very thing you're standing against is the majority of believers in your own faith?

Following God Into Failure

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At one point in the 18th Century, the famous leader-to-be of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, traveled to a colony in Georgia in order to act as the resident pastor. Things did not go well for him, however, and after just over two years, he fled back to England under cover of night.



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Third Question: What if you follow the path God sets out for you, only to be met with what appears to be failure?

Sometimes, the path God prepares for you may appear to be a foolish choice from the point-of-view of the world. Sometimes, you yourself may feel foolish along the way, or you may come to believe that you've failed, or that you're all alone.

Final Question: How can you tell whether you're following God, or simply following your own common sense? How can you tell the difference between true foolishness and the "foolishness of God" (1st Corinthians 1)?