

Where we start . . .

David Livingstone, explorer and missionary, spoke of his work:
People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Is it a sacrifice which brings its own blessed reward, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. I never made a sacrifice. (Speech to students at Cambridge University, December 4, 1857.)
How is it possible to *not think* of ministry for the Lord as “sacrifice”?

What we read . . .

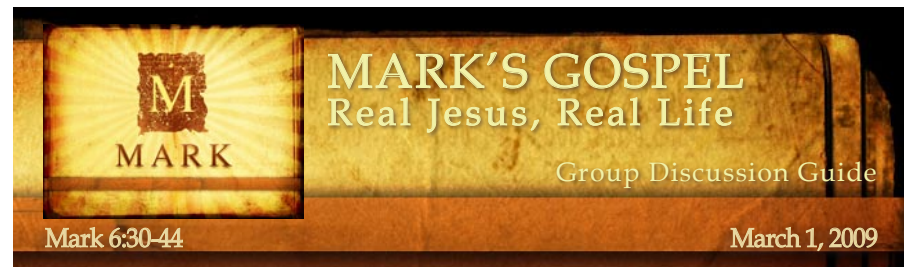
The disciples were invited into ministry by Jesus. Read of their opportunities in Mark 6:7-13 and 6:30-44.
What seems to move the disciples to invite Jesus to send the crowd away? Why would they ask Him to do that?
Why do they respond as they do when Jesus tells them what to do?
When it was all said and done, what kind of “sacrifice” did it take for the disciples to join Jesus in what He wanted to do?

What had the disciples learned in their earlier “missionary journey” (6:7-13)? What might have hindered them from living out what they had learned and experienced when facing the need of the crowd?

Why this matters . . .

As followers of Jesus, He invites us into what He wants to do. How will we likely respond to such invitations if we see His invitation as, primarily, about what we need to give to Him so He can carry out His desires?

What would be a better mind-set for approaching Jesus’ call to us to participate in what He wants to do?



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Diving in . . .

If we adopt the attitude that joining Jesus in what He is doing is fundamentally about *sacrificing* to help Jesus out, we are going to stumble when we hear His invitation. This happened with the twelve. Even after their incredible experiences in speaking of the kingdom and healing the sick, when faced with the needs of a hungry crowd, Jesus' invitation to them to "give the people something to eat" was seen as a sacrifice they could not meet rather than a fresh opportunity to see Jesus meet needs through them! And, as long as we think of ministry and serving as about what we have to sacrifice (as opposed to what Jesus will pour out through us!), we will resist His invitation . . . just as the twelve did.

Discussing . . .

Last week, as we explored the account of the disciples' "missionary journey" (Mark 6:7-13 with 6:30) and the intrusion of the account of John the Baptist's death (6:14-29), we concluded that at least part of what Mark seems to be underscoring is that being involved in the work of the kingdom *isn't really about us*. That is, what is key to the story of John (and what the disciples and all followers of Jesus need to see) is that faithfulness to do what one is given to do is what matters. Jesus had been doing that (6:1-6), He wanted the disciples to do that (6:7-13), and John's demise pictured that (6:14-29).

Clearly, there is a sense in which we must think of what happened to John as a sacrifice. He was killed because he was faithful to his God-given assignment. But it is important that we think of sacrifice the right way. Hopefully, the opening quote from David Livingstone can launch the discussion off in that direction.

Decades of ministry in the dark interior of unexplored Africa only sharpened Dr. Livingstone's perspective. He saw what he was doing for Christ as anything but sacrifice! His partnership with Jesus was privilege, and the riches of blessing that Jesus poured into his life rendered it foolish for Livingstone to think of what he was doing as if it were sacrifice.

The idea of sacrifice—if by it we mean to great personal loss we must suffer to partner with Jesus in His work—can get in the way of our willing participation in the kingdom. And that seems to be at least one dimension

of the trouble that the disciples had when they were faced with a new, pressing need.

In Mark 6:30-44, you read of the "feeding of the multitude." The account is probably familiar to most people; even those who weren't raised in the church may well have heard the account. As you read it, try and really enter into the experience of the disciples. That will be important to truly understand what happened.

When the disciples saw the crowd and recognized their need for food, they make what wasn't an all-together bad suggestion. The disciples themselves had just recently returned from their missionary adventure—a trip that saw them taking along no provisions. Thus, they likely have nothing with which to meet the needs of the crowd. (Or at least nothing that they are aware of!)

But when Jesus calls the disciples to "give them something to eat," they don't only respond out of their own sense of need, but they respond with sarcasm. They can't see it happening; the demand on them would be too great. They can't see themselves sacrificing that way.

When it is all over, the twelve have leftovers. When it is all over, the twelve did, in fact, give the crowd something to eat. But they didn't do it out of their own resources, with their own supplies. What Jesus wanted them to do, they did. What He intended for them came to pass. And in the process they were not impoverished, but enriched. That is, if they were able and willing to see it.

This account is not a parable; what we read really happened. But the account does picture a lesson for us. And this seems to be what Jesus intended for the twelve as well. He wasn't dependent on their help to get Him out of a tough situation with the crowd. He wasn't involving them because they were making up for some profound lack in Jesus or His resources. Jesus was not, basically, calling them to sacrifice but to participate. He wasn't looking to deplete them but pour out through them.

Apparently, Dr. Livingstone experienced this kind of life with Jesus. Yes, he went to Africa. Yes, he gave his life away there for the sake of the kingdom and the glory of the King. But he didn't see it as sacrifice because of what he experienced and received in the going and the giving. And, if they thought well about it, the twelve didn't really sacrifice either. They received—in a variety of tangible and spiritual ways—far more than they gave.

We need to think well about how we step into what Jesus invites us to. If we hear His call as if He is calling for us to help Him out, make up for His lacks, get Him out of a tight spot, we might conclude the sacrifice we are being asked to make is unreasonable. But if we realize (as pictured here) that He calls us only to involve us *for our benefit* as well as the benefit of others, then we will find it easy, we will find it joyful, we will find it inviting to respond to His invitation.