

Our Highest Calling

‘While the pastor called on the Stevensons, their youngest son came running into the house with a dead rat. His mother was aghast. “Don’t worry, Mom. He’s dead. Me and Jim, we bashed him until ... (and then Junior noticed the pastor) ... God called him home”.’

Now the existential question presented by this scenario is the very meaning of “calling”. Or rather, should we be considering the whole opposite notion of “sending”. You do you have to give it to Junior for an exquisitely smooth pivot so as to not “offend” the pastor! While it is unlikely that that rat had a divine calling on his life, such that it was to end so violently by a couple of thoughtless, mischievous boys, one could make an argument that its life being cut short in such fashion was “preordained”. And that argument can be based on the fact that the Lord Himself asserts that every one of the hairs on our heads are numbered. Also, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the notice, and foreknowledge, of God. These are hard and fast facts.

Narrowing our focus, we also know that Lord Jesus specifically and definitely “called” the disciples to follow Him. We also know what that calling entailed, ultimately. And for nearly all the original twelve disciples, it was martyrdom. Death. Torture and

physical death. Answering God's call on their lives led most of them to "untimely" deaths. From the world's perspective, that is. Once we are "called" by God to join Him at home in Heaven, we can ask them if it was worth it. Or whether they regretted answering Lord Jesus' call. But we won't need to. For we'll already know their answer. Not a single one of them will have even a shadow of a doubt that answering God's call was the best decision they ever made with their lives.

When they initially answered Lord Jesus' call to them, and they dropped their fishing nets, their tax documents, their swords, or whatever their livelihoods had been prior to crossing paths with the Savior of all the world, do you think even one of them could have had any accurate picture of where it would lead them? The answer is unequivocally no! We do know at various points in the Gospel reports that some of them envisioned exalted positions of glorious leadership and command in heavenly places, after they had supposedly led the "ragtag" armies of Israel to stunning, glorious victories over the Romans, and Israel entered a new, everlasting golden age of peace and prosperity on planet Earth. We have the brothers Jacob (James) and John, and their "tiger mother", to thank for this clear expression of their "hopes and dreams". Could that have really been how they perceived their "calling"?

In today's reading from Luke, we pick up with Lord Jesus explaining to His followers what to follow His calling really means. After that the Lord leads His three closest disciples, Jacob

(James), John and Peter up to a “high mountain”, which was surely Mt. Hermon, the highest peak in the Holy Land. And on that mountaintop, He was transfigured before these privileged three. For a few brief moments, these three disciples saw the Lord’s divine personage not concealed by His human flesh. Without having any idea of what was being revealed to them, they glimpsed the actual future of all who believe in and know the Lord Jesus. It is no accident that Lord Jesus chose this mountain and this particular moment to briefly reveal His divinity to the three. For only a few days earlier, at the base of this mountain, in the village of Caesarea Philippi, the Lord had asked the disciples Whom did the people say that He was, and then, point blank, He asked His disciples Whom they thought He was. It was here that Peter gave the Holy Spirit-inspired answer, recorded in Matthew 16:16, Mark 8:29, and Luke 9:20: “You are the Anointed One, God’s Messiah!”

This true identification of Christ Jesus is earth shattering all by itself. But when the context in which it was spoken is noted, its implications shake the foundations of the entire universe! Peter’s confession here is given in Caesarea Philippi, at the Cave of paneas, the altar to the false Greek god named pan, which was thought to be the very entrance to hell itself. Its depth has never been measured, even in our modern day. So it was here to all the world that Peter proclaims that this Son of Man standing in front of him is the actual Son of God, the Promised Messiah, the Savior prophesied to defeat evil in Genesis 3:15. For the Lord then an-

nounces to the entire universe, and to Peter, as recorded in Matthew 16:18-19: “I give you the name Peter, *a stone*. And this rock will be the bedrock foundation on which I will build My church—My legislative assembly, and the power of death will not be able to overpower it! I will give you the keys of Heaven’s kingdom realm to forbid on earth that which is forbidden in Heaven, and to release on Earth that which is released in Heaven”. The Lord had referred to Simon as Peter before this, indicating that Peter would have a primary leadership role in the early, formative days of the Church. But here the Lord is referring to Peter’s confession of the Lord’s actual identity as a “rock”, the foundation of faith, and not to Peter himself as a person. But in a double meaning, the Lord is also referring to a physical rock, the big rock, the mountain the base of which they were all standing. For on this “rock”, this confession of faith, and this particular mountain in the far north of Galilee, the Lord would build His future church; the same mountain the summit of which was covered with pagan altars to pan and baal and other false gods and idols.

So, just a few days later, when the Lord takes Peter, and John and Jacob (James) up to the summit to pray, His divine omnipotent authority is briefly revealed for all Heaven and Earth to see. The forces of evil from millennia before had laid claim to this mountain, to make it one of their headquarters of the kingdom of darkness on Earth. No more! Lord Jesus and His three human disciples are standing on its summit. And not just them, but the

great prophet and leader, long since dead, Moses now appears. He's not dead after all. Very much alive, and longing to speak with his and our Messiah and Lord, about the Lord's plans to defeat all evil once and for all. He's accompanied by the also long-dead prophet Elijah. Turns out, Elijah is also living. As those three heavenly Persons converse, Peter feels the need to offer his services to construct three cubicle tents, also known as tabernacles or booths, for the three exalted ones to stay in. But they weren't staying. Instead Father God's Own voice thundered all around them, "This is My Son, My Beloved One. Listen carefully to all He has to say". Talk about an unforgettable time!

But all this was not just for the disciples' and all future believers' benefit. This whole transfiguration proclaimed to all the universe that Lord Jesus has arrived to defeat all evil and death, once and for all. He plants His flag of victory on the highest of the mountains in the Holy Land, the very mountain that the devil and evil forces had thought was firmly in their hands. But the victory was not yet secured. A great price had yet to be paid. A great sacrifice would be required.

In fact, the Lord had just before this explained what following Him actually means. Luke 9:23: 'Jesus said to all of His followers, "If you truly desire to be My disciple, you must disown your life completely, embrace My 'cross' as your own, and surrender to My ways. For if you choose self-sacrifice, giving up your lives for My glory, you will discover true life".' At this point, the disciples

couldn't conceive of what He meant by "cross", and "self-sacrifice". Remember that just moments after Peter had given his spectacular confession proclaiming Lord Jesus' true identity, the Lord went on to tell them that He would have to suffer and die, and then rise again, whatever that meant. Impetuous Peter, a bit full of himself for having just said something his Master had so praised, had the gall to reprimand the Lord for saying something so horrible to contemplate—suffer and die! Peter learned a hard lesson that day how easily satan can influence our thoughts and words. He learned that same lesson again when he denied even knowing the Lord on the night of the Lord's arrest by the Sanhedrin. That time, upon the realization of what he'd said, he wept bitterly. Seems it behooves us to think before we speak. Right?

The example of what our Lord went through on the cross to secure the final defeat of the devil and all evil, and then the apostles' lives of total service and sacrifice to the Lord's Kingdom on Earth both show us what we're called upon to do. The transfiguration shows us the end result! Whatever we're led into this life in service to Lord Jesus is as nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us as Apostle Paul, our brother, states in Romans 8:18: "I am convinced that any suffering we endure is less than nothing compared to the magnitude of glory that is about to be unveiled within us". Believers, this is our high calling. The highest and best life we can ever live. Eternally! Join your life with His in prayer each and every day!

