



The Price of Christian Fame

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."

And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

They said to Him, "We are able."

And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." — Mark 10:35-45

In a recently released documentary titled "Elvis Presley: The Searcher", an entirely secular produced biography for HBO on one of the most iconic figures in American history, the two-part biopic covering his entire life showed how time after time, Elvis attempted to return to the roots of his church upbringing. Several times, beginning from the outset, specific mention was made of his personal belief that God was going to "do something special" in his life. Naturally, the makers of the documentary concluded that although his life was cut short by prescription drug abuse, this was nonetheless accomplished by the tremendous influence his body of music and movie appearances effected on the culture and music industry. Yet they still showed how in his private life, when things were the most difficult and when he was often dissatisfied with his achievements, he repeatedly

"The Price of Christian Fame", Page 1 of 5

returned to trying to get in touch with God personally. Both by the title of the documentary and its content, although he was raised in church and revisited those roots, he was still constantly searching.

I have seen this likewise present in other famous figures' lives, but have also witnessed the same phenomena among many who remained within the boundaries of the church as well. There has been no shortage of those who are convinced they have been specially called by God and should therefore pursue a path to elevate them to the top of the pyramid inside the Church, so to speak. It is important to note, however, that they all have in common pursuing self-elevation according to the world's way of working rather than God's. The common misconception they seem to experience is that this feeling of a "special" calling is a license to engage in a pursuit of fame and stature in the manner of the world and therefore in the end they wind up exactly like the world instead. They seem to think they have a license to make this happen in their own strength and determination.

When approached by James and John, Jesus first stipulates, "*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?*" Those who would be greatest in God's economy must endure the same example and path of Christ Himself. The cup referred to was not just the scorn, rejection and even opposition of so many others which Jesus experienced in the course of His earthly ministry, but includes the act of ultimately sacrificing Himself, even for those who rejected Him that they might ultimately live. It is speaking about personal sacrifice on many, multiple levels where the results are not enjoyed in the course of this life, but accomplished in the greater scheme of eternity.

But then Jesus goes on to explain that the world's model is **not** the Father's model. "*...the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner*". (Jn. 5:19) Those who achieve the pinnacle of the Kingdom of God accomplish it completely contrary to the world's ways. And this is the crux of the matter when it comes to those who perceive a "special calling" which they then believe entitles them to effect personal prominence at any price. Instead of seeking through God's Word to know and follow God's expectations for the process of fulfilling His will and working in their life, they misconstrue it as a license to pursue a superior standing using every means the world employs. They now believe that following the same path to celebrity the world has established is sanctified in their own pursuit of a parallel achievement in the name of God.

The most obvious and repeated examples of this are found in the area of Christian music. Probably no pocket within the Church has been more aligned with its secular doppelgänger than Christian musicians and the current crop of publishers who operate in no discernible different manner from the world. But it is equally present in so many other areas, and the common denominator is a belief that the ends justify the means. Because they believe they've received a "special" calling, they feel free to achieve it on their own without further deference to God's Word and ways. They jettison the clear biblical mandate that in God's estimation, the process is just as, if not even more important, than the goal. **How** we get there matters.

I am not saying that these people did not hear God speaking to them personally or even that they did not receive a "special" calling. Unless in the course of describing it they overtly specify some detail which is obviously contrary to the Word of God, who can say it is anything less than authentic? Scripture has a great many examples of "special" callings, such as Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David and Paul, just to name a few. I am addressing what immediately comes after, when one hears God speaking to them personally, but then fails to follow through by listening to all that God is further stipulating through His Word.

When someone believes they are called to be a teacher, they are subsequently guided by all that His Word provides to be an effectual biblical teacher; when someone believes they are called to be a missionary, they are subsequently guided by all that His Word provides to be an effectual biblical evangelist and church planter; when someone believes God has provided a "special" calling, it can only be achieved by the guidance and pursuit of His Word for its fulfillment in their life. The problem is in thinking that the calling is enough and no follow-through with His Word is warranted.

If you don't think so, just ask King Saul. He received an authentic "special" calling, and then pursued it on his own terms, forsaking the boundaries of God's Word and ways. The calling in and of itself was not enough; that he failed to pursue it biblically ultimately resulted in catastrophic loss both personally and for everyone around him. Yes, there are many examples of individual callings in Scripture, but none of them automatically exempted the recipient from the boundaries and guidance of God's Word.

Another accompanying feature of this situation which is often present is the belief that one should dedicate their self alone to this pursuit. The gifts and offices of the Church are

supposed to work together, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”. (Eph. 4:12-13) This group dynamic is completely antithetical to the elevation of self, especially according to the world’s model which encourages it be done at any cost regardless of anyone else’s feelings or opinions. Those who pursue their “special” calling without proper biblical follow-up can be identified by their operation in isolation not just from others, but the rest of the complimentary services of the whole Body of Christ. They ultimately arrive at a place where they view everything as subservient to them, believing that the universe revolves around their star.

But perhaps the most tragic application of this phenomena is when it becomes a central feature of the pulpit, where the persistent message is transmitted to the pews, “You are special and God has called you to be special”, especially in the absence of any biblical calling to achieving God’s will through servanthood. The true Gospel of Christ is centered on a denial of self where both our personal relationship with Christ is concerned as well as our personal relationships with others. Where Jesus is concerned, the mandate is, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me”. (Mt. 16:24) In our relationships with others this is directly reflected in the opening teaching on servanthood. There is an inherent problem in all the pervasive false teachings of our times which seek to make us feel special and superior by the world’s standards, and which never even graze the edges of self-denial and servanthood.

Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.”

*Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. **But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.**” — Mark 10:28-31*

A life devoted to Christ begins with a personal sacrifice—“Behold, we have left everything and followed You”, and is continually characterized by personal sacrifice. But God’s method is not the world’s method, even often working in a diametrically opposite fashion from the world. Or as specified in the opening teaching, “whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave

“The Price of Christian Fame”, Page 4 of 5

of all". (Mk. 10:43-44) God's calling is a journey designed to spiritually shape us into a vessel which completely loses all desire to promote one's self and instead become consumed with seeking God's glory alone.

Moses was called and during his first forty years raised in the perfect position (from a worldly viewpoint) to become the savior of his people as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, but it took the next forty years to be properly shaped into that role according to God's standards. He had to forsake the world's way for God's way. The prideful figure of his first forty years had no problem killing someone to accomplish his goals; the man shaped by God's in the subsequent forty years of working is described, "*Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth*". (Num. 12:3) Scripture is rich with examples of those with "special" calls whose pinnacle of fame either testifies to their personal submission to His Word and ways or their spectacular fall for rejecting same. The calling, without the follow-through, is not enough.

So you've received a calling. Perhaps it even falls into the category of a "special" calling. What do you do next? Did that calling come with a license to accomplish it any way you see fit? Or did it actually come with the stipulation that you would now seek its fulfillment in concert with His Word and ways? If it actually involves ultimately bringing the kind of celebrity status and public recognition equal to the world's level of visibility and influence—something Jesus actually achieved as, after all, who is a more famous historical figure than Jesus?—are you willing to pay the price **He** paid, to travel the same path **He** traversed?

Yes, there seem to be a great many who claim a calling which never actually took place, but what about those who have authentically responded? It is actually a path of biblical servanthood.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." — Mark 10:45

In Him,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org