



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Malleable Clay

Isaiah 45.9-13, 22-25; Luke 9.23-25, 57-62

David Anguish

### Introduction

1. What do you do when you discover that God's way is not what you thought it was?
  - a. Maybe you've come across a teaching in Scripture you've never noticed before.
  - b. Maybe you read a passage that left you questioning what you had always thought the Bible taught about a subject.
  - c. Maybe God is working out his purposes in ways you did not expect, or in ways that run counter to what you have always expected.
2. In this study of Isaiah 40-45, we have noticed repeatedly that Israel resisted the idea that God could be doing something different from what they had come to expect.
3. Isaiah 45.9-11 is probably a response to such a question. Based on the tone of God's words, it is not hard to imagine what Israel had done to precipitate them (see Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Commentary, 78-79).
  - a. How could God choose a foreigner to not only deliver his chosen people, but also call him his "anointed" ( מָשִׁיחַ, *mashiach*, 45:1)?
  - b. Israel had forgotten that God's ways were not their ways (Isa 55.8-9).
    - i. God could not tolerate an affront to his sovereignty.
    - ii. So he told Isaiah to warn those who would question him and described them as being like a pot challenging the potter, or like someone challenging acts of nature over which they have no control (45.9-10).
  - c. Verse 11 expresses God's displeasure; it is translated well in the NIV: "This is what the LORD says--the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?"
4. God is uncompromising.
  - a. He made the earth and put people on it; he commands the heavens and all their host. Why should he not determine how his people would be delivered (45.12-13)?
  - b. Furthermore, only he is capable of providing salvation; thus, he must be the only One in whom Israel trusts (45.22-25).
5. His call is for wholehearted commitment, the same call Jesus issues to all his followers.

## Body

### I. Jesus is (Now) Lord.

- A. Paul used Isaiah 45.23 in his declaration of Jesus' exaltation in Philippians 2.9-11.
1. Notice that, in Isaiah, the LORD is emphatic that every knee will bow and every tongue swear allegiance to *him*.
  2. But in Philippians, Paul said this allegiance will be given to *Jesus* (significantly, he used the personal name, not the title, "Christ").
  3. The point is to stress Jesus' exaltation, especially his place as "Lord" (Phil 2.11).
- B. Jesus' lordship is a central New Testament theme; Luke especially featured it.
1. Luke used the word "Lord" (κύριος, *kurios*) in noun and verb form more than any other Gospel writer (not all refer to Jesus, but most do; many are in the form of direct address).
    - a) 41% of all uses in the Gospels are in Luke (106 times), compared with Matthew (31%, 81 times), John (20%, 52 times) and Mark (7%, 19 times).
    - b) When we factor in the length of the books, Luke, the longest of the four, used the word more frequently (in 8.5% of his verses; cf. 6.9% of Matthew's, 5.7% of John's, and 2.5% of Mark's).
  2. All four saw Jesus as Lord, but Luke demonstrated special interest in stressing it.
    - a) Jesus is identified and honored as Lord (Luke 2.11; 19.38; cf. 6.5; 20.42).
    - b) Jesus expected those who identified him as Lord to be obediently loyal (6.46).
    - c) This expectation included:
      - (1) Trust in Jesus' ability to deliver healing, salvation, etc. (7.6, 9; cf. 5.12; 7.13; 11.1; 17.5-6; 18.28, 41-43).
      - (2) Total commitment to follow him (5.11, 27-28; cf. 16.13; 18.22; 22.39) leading to *surrender* (Luke 19.8), *accountability* (22.61), and involvement in his *work* (10.1).

### II. Choice and Commitment.

- A. Luke 9 is a snapshot of what it means to let Jesus' lordship shape one's life.
1. Verses 18-22 report Peter's confession of Jesus as "the Christ of God" (v 20).
  2. Right after his confession, Jesus declared the meaning of discipleship (vv 23-25).
    - a) He spoke of it in terms of bearing one's cross.
      - (1) In Jesus' day, cross-bearers were people who had committed a serious crime and were to be eliminated; it was a figure of shame and rejection.
      - (2) To bear one's cross, then, is not to deal with some problem, however severe, but to embark on the road involving rejection and death, separated from the world's values and lifestyles for the sake of the call.
    - b) The verbs in v 23 explain the expectation.
      - (1) The first two refer to a one time commitment (self-denial, cross bearing; Greek aorist).
      - (2) The third (following, Greek present) refer to a continuing journey based on that commitment.
    - c) Verses 24-25 highlight the contrast: it's a rejection of this world's ideals and priorities in exchange for the demanding, but ultimately satisfying way of Christ.
  3. Verses 57-62 give three examples that show the seriousness of the commitment.
    - a) The first exposes the misguided overconfidence of a would-be follower (57-58).

- (1) The man probably thought that following was like following a rabbi which typically involved only walking along behind him as he taught.
  - (2) To follow Jesus was more like following a prophet, "an itinerant teacher [who was] not part of an established community" and so "had an uncertain existence" that depended "on the donations of those who responded to his ministry" (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary, 284).
  - (3) The issue was faithfulness and the determination to give up things now in favor of greater glory later.
- b) The second and third appear to be reasonable requests (59-62).
- (1) Burial was a Jewish priority and saying goodbye to family was normal.
  - (2) In the first case, Jesus' response is rhetorical, designed "to make the point that discipleship and one's commitment to the kingdom [must] take priority even over family considerations.... [I]f a choice is to be made, God must have first place" (Bock, 285).
  - (3) The man who wants to say goodbye reminds Jesus of people like Lot's wife or the Israelites who longed to return to Egypt.
- c) We are not unfamiliar with the ideas involved, but for some reason do not often apply them to discipleship and church life.
- (1) An example is a soldier who cannot be with family at critical times (see General Dwight Eisenhower who missed his father's funeral in 1942 due to his service in World War II).
  - (2) The point: "Those who cling to life on earth as it is are not ready for the reformation that salvation brings. Jesus saves us not just to grant us a place in heaven but to transform us here and now into new people, separated from the world (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Titus 2:11-14). The disciple cannot hang onto the old life and be prepared for the rigors of discipleship.... Salvation is not a road paved with ease, for true spirituality takes discipline" (Bock, 285).
- B. These are hard sayings.
1. For many (most?) in our setting, identifying with Jesus was part of growing up, part of our Bible-belt culture. Often, it has cost little in terms of rejection by our world. (In a postmodern world, even critics are inclined to say, "to each his own".)
  2. Because we do not suffer, we can be prone to think that following doesn't cost.
    - a) Have you noticed how we sometimes recruit for ministry tasks by assuring people little sacrifice will be required?
    - b) In a world of choices, the challenge is real.
      - (1) Like the last two men in vv 57-62, we may think we can follow Jesus based on our agenda, choosing to give up only what we want to give up.
      - (2) The challenge for us may be more like that which faced the rich young ruler (Luke 18.22; cf. Peter's response in v 28) than the one that faced Peter in the courtyard (Luke 22.54-62).
  3. In truth, "if we are too comfortable in the world and if no one can tell our lives are different, it may be because we have not taken the full journey of discipleship Christ calls us to make" (Bock, 267).

*Conclusion*

1. As we conclude our study, I ask you to evaluate your commitment. Use the form provided and understand that your response (or failure to respond) is between you and God.
  - a. "My biggest obstacle to *wholehearted discipleship* is \_\_\_\_\_."
  - b. "The one thing I most need to be *more completely committed* to Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_."
  - c. Commit to evaluate your discipleship in light of reading Luke and prayer.
2. As you consider your responses, please think about the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died for his faith in 1945: "The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light. 'His commandments are not grievous' (I John 5.3)" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 40).

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*www.davidanguish.com*