

What am I worth? (4)

The cost of true worth: our response



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In the series on True Worth, we are considering the subject “What am I worth?” and today we will go on to the fourth message.

We have sought to consider the cost of true worth in the context of our appreciation of the example of two disciples of the Lord Jesus as recorded in **Mark 10: 35-45**.

When the disciples asked that they might sit on the right and on the left of the Lord Jesus in His glory, He told them: "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" In the last message, we sought to appreciate some aspects of the meaning of the cup and of the baptism.

Today we go on to consider further the cup and the baptism, and in particular, its relevance to us. We have seen that the cup and the baptism refer to primarily the event of the cross and what the Lord Jesus went through in His pain and suffering for the sake of sinful mankind.

The most intense suffering

Let us appreciate that the most intense suffering of the Lord Jesus occurred in the moral and spiritual realm in His heart, and not in His body, although the suffering in His body was very intense and severe.

It is very easy for us to be preoccupied with the physical sufferings as portrayed by the event of the cross in the physical plane. It is true He went through very intense suffering in the physical plane prior to the crucifixion as well as in the process of crucifixion.

However, we need to see beyond this, that the most intense suffering that He went through was in the moral and spiritual realm in His heart.

The Scriptures show to us that the intense suffering began during His time of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, and reached its climax at the ninth hour, when He uttered a loud cry of deep distress.

Soon after that, physical death took place.

From what I can see in the Scriptures, this process may correspond with drinking the cup leading towards going through the baptism.

Let us look at **Matthew 26: 36-37**

- 36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."
- 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

During this time, when He began to pray in the garden in Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus began to be grieved and distressed. And it is in the context of this prayer that we have, recorded: the Lord Jesus in deep agony.

Luke 22: 39-44 (NASB Updated Edition)

- 39 And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him.
- 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."
- 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and *began* to pray,
- 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."
- 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.
- 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

It is a picture of intense agony that the Lord Jesus went through. During this time of prayer, He said to God, the Father, "If You are willing, remove this cup from Me..."

So we see that the cup referred to what He was going through, and what He would continue to go through in the event of the cross.

The Lord Jesus at this point of time had indicated very clearly His full commitment to go through the cross. He said, "...not My will, but Yours be done."

He was prepared to suffer on behalf of sinful mankind, to absorb the punishment due to us, and the most difficult aspect of that suffering was in His relationship with the Father.

This agony described began intensely during this time, and it is very likely that He was growing in His identification with the sins of mankind. As He partook of the cup, His suffering grew in intensity and this reached its climax at the ninth hour, which we can read in:

Mark 15: 33-34 (NASB Updated Edition)

- 33 When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.
- 34 At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

This was a deep cry of distress as He identified with the sins of mankind and this would likely correspond with the baptism of death as He entered into the climax of His suffering on the cross. It was soon after He uttered this cry that the Lord Jesus died physically.

Luke 23: 44-46 *(NASB Updated Edition)*

- 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour,
45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.
46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.

It was a process of suffering that the Lord Jesus went through, and this could very well correspond with drinking the cup in the suffering leading towards the climax of pain and anguish and agony in the baptism of death.

In the moral and spiritual realm, the Lord Jesus before His incarnation had always been in deep and perfect fellowship with God, the Father.

However, at this point of time, because of His identification with the sins of mankind, He cried out: "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" God in His wrath and anger against sin had to manifest that judgment on the Lord Jesus Christ, and He suffered that separation from God on our behalf.

This is an issue that is not easy for us to appreciate. But the more we grow to know the Lord Jesus, the more we appreciate His life and being, the more we will understand the meaning of this suffering. If we want to develop true worth in our being, we need to learn to drink the cup and to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized.

The most difficult aspect of the Lord Jesus' suffering was not in the physical realm.

Likewise, the most difficult aspect of following the Lord fully and being close to Him is not in the physical and temporal realm but in the moral and spiritual realm of the heart.

We must learn to understand what went on within Him, what it means, what it cost Him as He went through the process of drinking the cup and being baptized with that baptism. If this aspect in us is not deeply developed, our worth will always remain superficial no matter what we may have done for the Lord or suffered for Him in the physical and temporal realm.

Throughout our lives, we need to learn to continue to deepen our understanding of this, and to grow in our identification with Him if we are to develop true quality in our being.

The whole life and the specific occasions

It is good for us to appreciate that the baptism and the cup have two elements that are important for our recognition and application.

The baptism, at the point of time when the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples, was in the future as well as in the present. Both aspects are important for us to appreciate.

When the Lord Jesus said in **Luke 12: 50**, "...I have a baptism to undergo..." He was referring to the baptism in the future. This was a reference to His death on the cross: "...I have a baptism to undergo..." It would be a baptism of great distress.

Similarly, this would apply to the cup. The cup was in the future when it referred to the event of the cross. So when the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples, there was this aspect of the future element of the event of the cross.

But the Lord Jesus also referred to it in the present: He said to His disciples, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" This tells us that there was a present element with regard to the cup and the baptism.

Although it referred to the event of the cross in the future, it was in reality already in operation at that point of time. Both the cup and the baptism were in reality present in the life of the Lord Jesus throughout His life.

When He came into this world to identify with mankind, to become the Saviour of the world, the principle of the cup and the baptism was already present in Him.

That is why **Isaiah 53** describes Him as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It was not just at the event of the cross that there was deep grief in His heart. Throughout His life He was a man of sorrows... acquainted with grief. He came for this purpose.

He had already undertaken to identify with the sins of mankind, and throughout His life there was deep pain and anguish in this whole process of caring for us, loving us, seeking to help us, and giving up His life for us.

Yes, it culminated at the cross, but throughout His life this principle of the cup and the baptism was always in operation.

So too for us, we must learn to live with such a spirit throughout our lives, and at the same time be prepared for specific occasions of intense difficulty and suffering for the sake of the will of God, for the sake of the well-being of others, and for what is truly good and meaningful for eternity.

It is not enough for us just to prepare for difficult times ahead. We must be prepared to live like that each moment of our lives: drinking the cup, being baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized.

It is a life as a living sacrifice to God, a life offered up to God for what is good and meaningful throughout our lives. Yes, there will be times when the suffering will become more intense and difficult, but it is this whole way of living that must characterize our lives if we are to develop true worth in our being.

If indeed we follow Him fully in the path of self-giving, we will be close to Him in glory. That is the only way for us to be truly close to Him in glory.

In moral and spiritual meaning and reality, there are different degrees of closeness to the Lord, and how close we are to Him will directly depend on the quality of our identification with Him in drinking the cup and going through the baptism.

Therefore it is vitally important that we prayerfully seek to understand the cost of true worth, and knowingly, voluntarily and gladly choose the path of following Him all the way wherever this would lead us, and persevere in it all our lives. It is in this path that true worth will be produced in our being, and we will draw closer and closer to the Lord in His heart.

Our response

However, in reality, our response is often not what it ought to be. Although we want to develop true worth, we often do not pay sufficient attention to what it means. Neither do we adequately pursue this path to develop as the Lord may teach us.

Let us learn from what these two disciples went through. The response of James and John helps us to appreciate the way we often respond to the cost of true worth.

Mark 10: 38-39

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

39 And 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.

Why did James and John say, "We are able"? Why did they respond in this way?

From the context, from the Scriptures, we know that they did not understand the reality of the cup and the baptism. And yet they said, "We are able."

They should have known from the way the Lord Jesus spoke to them, that they should be very careful in their response. The Lord said, "You do not know what you are asking for." And then He said, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

A more meaningful response would have been: "Lord, teach us: what is the cup and what is the baptism?" The Lord had said, "You do not know what you are asking for." And yet, they were so confident to say, "We are able."

This is also true of Christians throughout the centuries. There are many things that God wants to teach us, but we are very quick to respond. We think we know when in reality we do not know.

James and John may have thought that they knew what it might mean, and they were quick to profess their preparedness to follow the Lord instead of humbly seeking the Lord's teaching on this issue.

So too for many of us: There are many things that we do not know, and God wants to teach us, but it is very difficult for Him to teach us because we think we know. "I have heard it before... I know what it means... and I have already responded... I have developed."

When we think in this way, when we profess in this way, we hinder ourselves from learning, and it will be difficult for us to grow well if this is not corrected.

James and John probably thought that they had already chosen to follow the Lord Jesus fully. They did not understand the higher levels of following the Lord, although there was already a reasonably meaningful level of following the Lord.

It is true they loved the Lord. They were willing to follow Him – that is true. But, there were aspects of following the Lord that they had not yet understood.

Mark 1: 16-20

- 16 And as He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.
- 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."
- 18 And they immediately left the nets and followed Him.
- 19 And going on a little farther, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets.
- 20 And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

We see here that these disciples responded readily to the Lord Jesus' call to follow Him. They left everything and followed Him. They were prepared to walk with Him, to give up their physical comforts, earthly relationships, in order to obey the Lord and to follow Him.

So it could be that having responded in this way, James and John thought that they had already given up all things to follow the Lord Jesus.

So, they would be able to drink the cup and to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized. They could have thought, "There is nothing that we are not willing to go through for the Lord."

However, in reality, they were still preoccupied in their hearts with their own desires rather than being identified with the Lord Jesus and what was in His heart.

They did not appreciate the meaning of drinking the cup and being baptized with the baptism with which the Lord was baptized. Instead, they were more concerned about positions of glory for themselves.

They had not yet reached a higher level of following Him. They were not ready to drink the cup or go through the baptism that the Lord Jesus was referring to, but they thought they were ready.

Let us read **Mark 10: 32-34**

- 32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him,
- 33 *saying*, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him to the Gentiles.
- 34 "And they will mock Him and spit upon Him, and scourge Him, and kill *Him*, and three days later He will rise again."

The Lord Jesus was sharing with His disciples something of very, very great importance, something that was a very deep burden in His heart. He was sharing with them the impending event of the cross, what He was going to go through for the sake of the world, to be the Saviour of the world, what He was going to suffer as a result of this course of action.

It was something very weighty... serious... important... in His heart. The Lord Jesus was in fact describing the event of the cross ... the drinking of the cup... going through the baptism.

But we read in the next verse:

Mark 10: 35

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

In the context of the Lord Jesus telling them what He was going to go through in His suffering, James and John were thinking, "We want to sit on His right and on His left in His glory."

They were not ready to drink the cup or to go through the baptism. They did not understand what they were asking. For them to do that, they had to drink the cup, they had to go through the baptism. At this stage, they were not ready, but they thought they were.

In the midst of their lack of understanding of the issues involved, and their lack of awareness of their own inadequacy, they were self-confident in their assertion, "We are able."

This is similar to Peter's self-confidence when he declared that he would never deny the Lord. The apostle Peter thought that he was prepared to go through any situation with the Lord.

If you read the passage in **Matthew 26: 31-35**, you will see that Peter said to the Lord Jesus, "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." He also said, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."

All the disciples said the same thing too. They thought they were prepared to go through whatever difficulty necessary to follow the Lord Jesus, but in reality it was not so.

Even in the physical plane, they faltered and they failed. **Matthew 26, verses 55 and 56** tell us that in the context when the Lord Jesus was about to be arrested, all the disciples left Him and fled. Subsequently in **Matthew 26: 69-75**, we read how the apostle Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times. He even denied the Lord Jesus with an oath. He also began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!"

The effects of the world

This tells us that they did not quite understand themselves. They did not know their own inadequacy, but they were confident that they were prepared to follow the Lord. In their hearts they were still significantly affected by the world. They were drawn by its attractions of self-glory, and they were fearful of its opinions, its threats and its opposition.

What the world says can have a very powerful effect on our lives. The evil one accentuates what the world may say to us and offer to us.

The opinions of men affect us very deeply and very readily. Although they are subjective, they are variable and they are unreliable, yet they can affect us so much. We are afraid of what others will think of us.

Status in this world, we know, is temporary, and yet it can give us a sense of importance in this world, and we may be drawn towards that. Rewards and recognition that the world can offer us can easily attract us and ensnare us. At the same time, rebuke and rejection from the world can frighten us and compel us...

To what extent are we influenced by the world so that we do not really follow the Lord Jesus as we ought to?

If we want to develop true worth, we must be prepared to reject the world: what it says and all that it offers and threatens. We must learn instead to be fully identified with the Lord: His will, His ways, His power and His life.

How do we respond when the Lord seeks to teach us the meaning of following Him at a higher level?

Very readily, we find that the element of unhealthy self-confidence arises within us, and this will hinder us from a deeper level of transformation in the quality of our hearts.

We think we know when we do not yet know. We think that we have attained when we have not yet reached that level. All this can hinder us from what the Lord seeks to do in our lives.

In the midst of much that God may be seeking to teach us, there is a danger that we may have knowledge without life... understanding without power... awareness without conviction.

The apostle Paul put it this way in

1 Corinthians 8: 1-3

- 1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.
- 2 If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know;
- 3 but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.

We have knowledge about many things. We may be aware of many spiritual principles, but if that knowledge is not accompanied by a deep love for God and a genuine transformation of our lives, then that knowledge can easily make us arrogant. It will, in fact, draw us away from God.

But if we develop, as we should, moral and spiritual quality of being, then love will be prominent in our hearts, and love will edify. We will not be comparing with other people to see who is more knowledgeable... who is more capable... but we will be concerned for the genuine well-being of others. Love seeks to edify, to contribute to the genuine well-being of others.

If that is not true in our hearts, then we have not known as we ought to know.

So we need to beware of acquiring knowledge without spiritual reality – of deep love for God and for others.

There are many issues that God wants to tell us, but we have come across them before, we have heard them before... and so we say, “I know already!” and so we do not sufficiently listen... and therefore we do not grow.

Should we be confident?

We may then wonder: Is it therefore better for us to be always uncertain... not to be confident? Self-confidence leads to danger... problem... failure... being drawn further away from God. So, should we always be lacking in confidence? We should not assert things strongly... we should not profess things categorically... we must say, “I don’t quite know... I’m just learning”?

And we become very apologetic in our faith... we are afraid to stand up as a Christian, to stand for God, for what is right. Sometimes we may think that that is being humble.

However, that is not the path of true worth. To develop true worth, we must develop deep convictions: convictions that we are prepared to stand by, to live out, and to die for.

God does not want us always to live without confidence, but it must be the right kind of confidence.

Personal knowledge

Genuine personal knowledge can lead to meaningful confidence within proper limits. If we develop genuine personal knowledge that is not just intellectual and emotional, we can grow in a meaningful confidence as long as we understand our proper limits.

A very interesting passage can be found in **John 9: 24-25**. Here we read the story of the blind man who was healed by the Lord Jesus:

John 9: 24-25

- 24 So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner."
25 He therefore answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

This man at this stage knew very little, but he was prepared to stand by what he knew. Although he knew that by answering in this way, the Pharisees would be angry with him, he was prepared to assert: "One thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

Are there aspects that we do know, and we are prepared to stand by them?

Can we say, "I do know that the Lord Jesus has saved me... my sins have been forgiven; there are many things I do not know, but this I do know: I have found meaning in life as a result of what the Lord Jesus has done for me"?

Do we have enough confidence to stand by that? Or, would we say, "I do not know"?

This man at that point of time did not fully appreciate who the Lord Jesus was, but he knew he was blind, now he saw.

His understanding was limited, but there was a direction in his understanding that was correct. Not only was he healed physically but he appreciated the meaning behind the healing.

He understood something beyond the physical: **John 9: 17**... we read:

They said therefore to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet."

He said, "I do not know whether He is a sinner, but I see that He is a prophet", meaning a prophet of God, someone working on behalf of God.

He could be taught and helped because he was prepared to stand by what he had come to know, and he was prepared to go further when he understood more.

This is a very important principle for us to learn.

He understood little, but he could be taught, he could be helped, because what he knew, he was prepared to stand by, and he was prepared to go further when he came to appreciate more when he was taught.

John 9: 30-41

- 30 The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes.
- 31 "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.
- 32 "Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.
- 33 "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

- 34 They answered and said to him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they put him out.
- 35 Jesus heard that they had put him out; and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
- 36 He answered and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"
- 37 Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you."
- 38 And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.
- 39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind."
- 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?"
- 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

When the Lord Jesus met this blind man again, He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

He was open to be taught. He recognized the Lord Jesus as a prophet who came from God, and when the Lord Jesus told him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you", he recognized and he responded. He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.

A humble and contrite spirit

We may say we know very little... it is difficult for us to grow. But God is prepared to help any one of us at any stage in our development.

The most important issue is: Are we humble and contrite, or are we self-confident? Do we think we know so much when we actually do not? If we are humble and contrite, God will teach us. There is much, much more that He can show to us, and help us to learn, if we are teachable.

God wants us to develop healthy and strong confidence, but this can arise only when there is a deep personal knowledge of the Lord, in identification with Him and dependence on Him.

In **Philippians 4: 13**, we read the words of the apostle Paul... he said:

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The apostle Paul was confident. He did not say, "I am very uncertain what it will be. I do not know how to live my life." He said: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

This was because the apostle Paul had learnt and grown over the years. He had developed a deep personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain was a way of life in him.

He had learnt to depend on the Lord Jesus as he sought to serve Him, as he sought to help others, as he sought to deepen in his walk with God.

If we want to develop true worth, then we must strive to know the Lord deeply, with a healthy understanding of the cost of following Him. Let us not too quickly say, "Yes, I am willing, to do whatever He wants of me." We must understand the cost and humbly ask Him to teach us, and be prepared to take our stand, to make our commitment, as we understand what it means.

A humble and contrite spirit is critical to rising to a higher level of following the Lord and developing true worth in our being. But this is very difficult to nurture.

God tells us that He dwells with him who is humble and contrite in spirit, because such a person can be taught and helped. Such a person is prepared to take all necessary steps to correct failures and to change for the better.

If we are not prepared to face our failures, if we want to preserve our face... our name... our reputation... instead of seeking the Lord to understand accurately so as to live well, then we will not be able to grow in depth and quality.

A humble and contrite spirit in the context of God's grace and provisions leads us in the direction of increasing quality of purity of heart and the development of true worth in our being.

In the Scriptures, we read of Moses, a man mighty in words and deeds in Egypt. Although Moses loved God and loved the people of God, he was at one time quite confident while he was in Egypt, and he thought that he could serve God and help others... but he realized that he could not serve God and help others by means of his own powers and abilities.

He subsequently learnt deeply to be humble and contrite before God during his forty years in the wilderness, and as a result became a great leader of the people of Israel.

Confidence in the midst of weakness

Let us ponder over the example of the apostle Paul as he sought to fulfil God's call to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

How did the apostle Paul respond?

He was at one time very confident in his own abilities, his background, as well as his religious zeal in the keeping of the Law.

However, when he met the Lord Jesus, he realized how great a sinner he was. He was deeply humbled, and he began to realize in a deep sense the need to depend on God at all times, and not to trust in himself and his abilities – confidence in the flesh.

The apostle Paul had to deal with this very deeply in his life. God helped him and taught him.

As a result, we read these words in **1 Corinthians 2: 1-5**

- 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.
- 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.
- 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.
- 4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
- 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

The apostle Paul said, "If others have confidence in the flesh, I far more..." He had grounds to be confident in the flesh. The apostle Paul was capable and wise in the world, but he became "a fool" in order to be wise. As a result of that, others regarded him as a fool when he was in reality wise in the Lord Jesus.

He said to the Corinthians: ...when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom – which he could have done... in earthly, natural, worldly wisdom. But he said, "No, I did not do that." He said instead, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

When the apostle Paul said this, he was not saying, "I know there is a man called Jesus. He came and He died for the sins of the world. He died on the cross for us."

It was not a distant, intellectual knowledge. When he said, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, it was a deep personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

He had drunk of the cup; he had gone through the baptism. He understood what the Lord Jesus went through on the cross – the meaning of the cross. Yes, there was more for him to learn, but the apostle Paul had come to a meaningful level of appreciation of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

He said: I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Contrast it with what James and John said: "We are able." The apostle Paul said: "I am not able. Unless God were to enable me, I would fail. Unless I know His presence in my life and I depend on Him, I have nothing to contribute to you" – I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

The apostle Paul knew... the only way to develop quality is through being humble and being dependent on God, to receive God's life, to be transformed in his being, to know the power of God transforming his being.

And so he said: my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

He knew the power of the Holy Spirit: the power of the resurrection. He knew the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ... conformed to His death: the cup of suffering, the baptism of death. And in that context, he preached, he taught, he served... He said: that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

How do we help other people: by our own wisdom... by the wisdom of the world... by clever ideas... or persuasive techniques? Or do we help others by the power of God, through the cross – the message of the cross in living reality... the Spirit of God speaking to their hearts... piercing as a sword... revealing the intents of the heart?

Evaluation

So then, as we ponder over the cost of true worth, let us consider our response. How have we been responding to the Lord? He is calling us to a higher plane of following Him. He wants to help us to prepare for lasting and ultimate worth in eternity. How are we responding to that?

Are we preoccupied with the things of this world? Are we so concerned about what others think of us rather than what God thinks of us? Are we preoccupied with the responsibilities of this world and what the world offers to us? Or are our hearts absorbed in our Father's business, the things of God, the things of eternity, that which is of true and ultimate value?

Are we learning more about the meaning of drinking the cup and going through the baptism? Is there a need for us to re-evaluate our lives afresh and honestly, so that God will find it meaningful to teach us His ways and to help us to attain to what is truly of meaning and worth in our lives?

This is a path that we need to take, and we need to continue to evaluate our lives, throughout our lives, so that where areas are not right, we will recognize and correct them; where we have chosen the right path... intensify and deepen.

It is a difficult path. It is very costly. But it is worth it.

Let us ask Him to help us to evaluate our lives in the light of what He has to say to us. Let us ask Him to search our hearts... help us to know where we have gone astray... help us to know areas that we need to correct...

Let us ask Him to teach us how to identify with Him in what is truly important in life. Let us not be self-confident, but let us learn to be meaningfully and deeply confident in Him, through His enabling in the context of His grace.