

The following is an abridgement of the sermon by Rev Dr Samuel Wang on Sunday, 2nd July 2017, in conjunction with JCC's 50th Anniversary Thanksgiving:

The Gospel Keeps on Going Round and Round

Grace and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Matthew 10

You would have heard from Matthew Chapter 10 that when Jesus sent out the Twelve to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 6), He sent out the Twelve to cast out demons and heal all the sick, to save them from their bondage under the power of the Devil. In effect, they were to proclaim that the one who was prophesied to be Good News for Israel was finally here (*Matthew 10:20ff*).

Troubles would accompany the Twelve. They would be beaten and put on trial. They would be persecuted and could even lose their lives for the sake of Jesus. But Jesus encouraged the Twelve to carry their cross and follow him (v. 39) for He expects them to lose their life for him. Instead of assuring them that he would send angels to protect them and kill all their enemies, he pronounced that they were to take up their cross (v. 38)! Now, this means Jesus expected them to be ready to suffer the consequences of doing ministry in his name – even to the point of death. They were to be ready to suffer and die in the hands of the Roman authorities for His sake!



Today, we continue to listen to the last section of Chapter 10, verses 40-42. Jesus preached that whoever welcomed the Twelve welcomed Him and the Father, who sent Him (v. 40). When Jesus said that whoever welcomed the disciples were welcoming the Sender of the mission, they might not be so comforted. For it is also true that those who didn't welcome the Sender – Jesus and God who sent Him – would not welcome the Twelve at all.

Sacrifice for ministry

God's Word tells us that ministry in His name requires sacrifice. What did you sacrifice today for the sake of doing ministry in the name of Jesus?

When people hear today's Gospel reading, they will think more of the rewards that await them for doing ministry than the cross that they are expected to carry.

Sacrifice is not a nice word; it requires giving up what you think is precious to you. So, what is precious to Singaporeans today? What is precious to you? Is it time? I heard many of you complaining that you don't have enough time.



Ministry means sacrificing your time for doing things that you consider important to you. But while you have time for the important and urgent things in your life, you don't have time when it comes to ministry: listening to people, sharing God's love for them through concrete actions, which takes up your time.

Today, there are people misguided about God to think that God wants them to kill so that they will receive paradise as their reward. These are suicide bombers who are willing to give up their life to take yours. On the contrary, are you, sent by God, willing to give up your life so people can have eternal life?

We are likely to be misguided about what God thinks is important in life if we have no time for ministry. How much time are we spending on things that do not bring life, but finally ends together with our death?

Sacrifice means you must give up something precious. What are the things you are not willing to give up for the sake of ministry in Jesus' name? Sometimes it isn't time, but it could be your pride.

After some megachurch pastors' salaries were made known in the newspaper a few years back, everyone thought pastors are all loaded. When insurance people ask what I do, I find myself reluctant to say "a pastor" for fear of misunderstanding.

Am I willing to let go of my pride to suffer misunderstanding and admit that I am a pastor in public and let people think whatever they want of me? Sometimes I am not willing. How about you?

To be a pastor you need to be thick-skinned for God. God calls a special breed to the public ministry of Word and Sacrament, and few answer him by saying yes because few can sacrifice their pride and take human rejection.

In the office, at the business meeting, will you give up your pride and stand firm on Christian values knowing that you might face ridicule or judgement from your boss or colleagues? That is a sacrifice for the Lord Jesus, a form of carrying your cross to follow him. You know this is what you should do, but you don't do it for fear of rejection.

We are both lost as we refuse the cross that accompanies ministry.

Teaching the glorious Word of God

The same Word that judges us also tells us that it is good news! The Father sent the Son, and the Son sent the ministers of the Gospel so that people can have faith.

This glorious Word of God should be taught as much as possible in our churches. Listening to the gospel in church or reading it in the Bible is the same as if we were listening to God himself in heaven among all his angelic hosts. And if there is no other benefit than this, it will still be a tremendous thing on its own, to have heard God himself talking to us with our ears.

The world doesn't think like this and treats ministers of God's Word with scorn. Therefore God forsakes them to their fake news and fables. But God's Word is meant to work like this among believers: "Blessed are they who hear the Word and keep it." (Lk 11:28).

This teaching is both a comfort to the pastor and to the lay person who preaches God's Word. When the pastor preaches God's Word, he can be assured that the words from his tongue are none other than the words of God, but he can only be sure of this when he preaches God's Law and Gospel correctly. So, it is the same for the lay person who preaches; he can assure his listeners that they are hearing God's Word when it calls them to repentance and comforts them when they repent.

So, whoever hears you, when you preach God's Word (whether you are a pastor or a layperson), hears the one who sent you: Jesus Christ. For he says to you just as he said to the Twelve "Whoever hears you, hears me".

This teaching should help us withstand the world when they scorn us because they are not scorning us but the one who sent us. So, whether you are glorified or despised for speaking God's Word, it is not you but the Lord himself who is glorified or despised.

Today, when you say "I have not sacrificed my time, or given up my pride, or have not carried my cross" (the cross means what makes you die to self) – if you repent, your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

50 years of faithfulness in ministry

For the last 50 years, God sent faithful pastors to preach God's Word to you, carrying out Jesus' ministry through the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin and

forgive all who repent. You are taught and baptised, washed and cleansed. Your infant faith is nourished by the pastor continuing to preach and teach you, feeding you the Body and Blood of Christ

Through this ministry of God's Word and Sacraments, believers gather together in communion with each other, loving one another.

All are sent to preach the gospel to their family and friends and share God's love in concrete action. Then among the lay people, leaders are called to minister alongside pastors as care group leaders, councilmen, altar guild and Sunday School teachers to teach and preach the ministry to fellow Christians, helping all in the church to be grounded in the apostolic doctrine, the Gospel of our Lord.

Then there are also "these little ones" who are in every church; they are not the leaders but, nevertheless, are faithful disciples whom the Lord loves and gives them to us so that we can take special care of them. They are weak and vulnerable, but you all take care of them; even if you give a small cup of cold water to help them, you will then already be serving Jesus. Remember Jesus placed a little child among his disciples to stop them arguing about who is the greatest? He says, to such little ones belong the Kingdom.



Personally, my family received your ministry as "one of these little ones" when we first came to JCC. At that time, my child, Hannah, still had a lot of operations to go through at the hospital, but you visited us, brought chicken soup for my wife, prayed for us and comforted us. We are grateful to God for you.

Today, as you celebrate 50 years of God's ministry in JCC, God says to you: Remember your humble roots, when the church started; it was to reach out to industrial workers in Singapore's with the Gospel. Don't forget the "these little ones", for they are those whom God sent to you, because you are also "one of these little ones" (the disciples) who received the gospel.

Then the generations after you will continue to say:

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.
I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens (Ps 89:1-2). Amen.*

