“I did it my way”

Proverbs 14:10-13, 16:1-6, Mark 8:34-9:1

And now, the end is near;  
And so I face the final curtain.  
My friend, I'll say it clear,  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.  
I've lived a life that's full.  
I've traveled each and ev'ry highway;  
But more, much more than this,  
I did it my way.

This is from a famous song written in 1968 by a famous pop songwriter and singer called Paul Anka and made famous by Frank Sinatra. It’s an iconic song of the 20th century. It doesn’t matter what I do or did - I did it my way. My way. Not his way, or her way, the Government’s way, the Barbara Woodhouse way, the communist way, the Muslim way - the Christian way. NO I did it MY way. Listen to the last verse of My Way.

For what is a man, what has he got?  
If not himself, then he has naught.  
To say the things he truly feels;  
And not the words of one who kneels.  
The record shows I took the blows -  
And did it my way!

The Bible has a lot to say about “my way” - quite remarkable considering that it was written thousands of years ago. Prov 14: 12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

My way. My way leads to death. It leads to separation from God and for a lost world that’s an eternal separation. Hell. Because my way is a selfish way. It fulfills my needs, my wants, my aspirations.

What’s wrong with “my way”. What’s wrong with wanting a little happiness? I don’t hurt anybody - well not much. Prov 16: 2 All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD.

If I were to look for a verse that sums up what God says through His word, the bible, says about human aspirations then its Prov 14: 12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Why? Because it’s a way without God on earth and in the end any way without God leads to death.

I probably don’t really have to say much to you as you agree. I’ve mentioned My Way so much over the last seven months they you are wondering why you are hearing more of it. It’s because what way you follow, is important. We often use this verse of non-Christians, but it’s loaded with warnings for God’s people I believe and we must lay our spiritual foundations for the future on establishing what way we as God’s people are trying to follow.

The other problem is that often we think that God’s word somehow doesn’t apply to us. Prove 14:12 is OK for non-believers, but not for believers. Not so, because it reminds us of the dire consequences of doing things MY Way - and the trouble is that is the way we do follow as Christians.

Some passages of scripture have a certain ethos developing about them over the years. The passage in Mark 8 is one of them. You’ve heard it all before and you probably don’t think it applies to you. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” That’s for young people to encourage them in commitment isn’t it. That’s for disciples only - so it doesn’t apply to me.

I’ve mentioned before that one of the great lies of the 20th century is the notion that you become a believer first and when you reach a standard of commitment you become a disciple. People can link church membership with discipleship. You accept Christ as Saviour and later you accept Him as Lord. So passages like Mark 8 encourage young Christians to become believers - to stick on their go faster stripes, turbocharge their spiritual lives, give their whole life to Him as missionaries and live happily ever after.

Rubbish!
The New Testament shows no distinction between being a believer and being a disciple. When you accept Christ as Saviour you accept Him as Lord. One of the reasons I believe that the church in Britain has been so impotent in attracting believers and retaining them is that the gospel has been half a gospel and you don’t end up with half-disciples - they are usually non-disciples. The Sharing Jesus people will know that in a US survey, over 90% of “converts” at evangelistic rallies have “fallen away” within a year. Op perhaps they weren’ there in the fist place. Why? Probably because the gospel they have heard is My Way - Come to Jesus because he will deal with my problems. Hell be my friend. He’ll make me happy.

It’s a gospel devoid of God’s love, It’s devoid of the broken body, the shed blood. There is nothing on the cost of salvation and repentance is usually thin. Yet if we understand what it means for Jesus’ body to be broken and His blood shed then we have to say Lord, You’ve done this for me - accept the whole of my life!

And in Mark 8 being a disciple is the total opposite of what the My Way world of today is about. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

You want to follow me says Jesus - then DENY yourself. It costs to be a disciple of Jesus. It costs when you are a teenage and you lose your friends. It costs when your workmates laugh at you. It costs when your neighbours don’t have anything to do with you. It costs at 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90.

Being a disciple will cost you throughout your life if you are being faithful to Christ - unless you opt out and do it “MY Way”. The Church in Britain in the 21st century is still in opt out mode - it’s an opt out Church. We know our Bible, we know the way we should live according to His will but we do it my Way. And it comes as a surprise when we see somebody doing it His way.

There was a young man studied at university and when he finished he started to look for a job. His father got him an interview with the chairman of a banana exporting company. The chairman was impressed with him until he blew it! The chairman asked him what he did in his spare time.

Oh, said the young man, I play soccer and of course I spend much of my time at Church. In fact one day I hope to give my life to Christian missions.

That did it! The chairman could not in good conscience spend the money necessary to train a new man only to have him leave for the mission field. So he said, “Young man, your ambitions are noble; but if we want men who will give their lives to bananas.”

He needed to be Bananas about bananas

Many successful people have focused commitment like Steve Redgrave who gave his life to achieving his gold medals. Why? He thought the cause was worth giving his life for.

He was Bananas about rowing

Arguably, if you want success, you have to give your life for it. That’s the message of the world. The more important something is to you, the more it will absorb you.

This is to me what is at the heart of this passage - who we believe Jesus is lies at the heart of what kind of Christian we are.

We should be Bananas about Jesus - Keith Green

We have just experienced Easter and are going to have communion in a few moments. We hear those facts afresh this morning. Are we bananas for Jesus - or have we gone cold?

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

What does he say - I’ m going to die - and if you would follow me you’ ve got to die daily. Not a great piece of PR - I’ m going to die and to follow me, you’ ve got to be prepared to do the same. Not exactly very good press - and it’s pretty easy to avoid preaching it.

What did the cross mean - rejection, suffering, etc. But Jesus death meant more - it was about surrender.
But it was also about hope - resurrection - new life.

Now says Jesus - you want to follow me - you take up your cross. Taking up your cross doesn’t mean martyrdom - remember the banana man and Steve Redgrave. Jesus was our example - he did give his life literally. If we start to understand that, we understand how all consuming our lives should be in his service. You understand what it was for the Son to become human, you understand how his desire to redeem us consumed him, how he suffered, how he died then you understand then it should consume you with passion too.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,  
Love so amazing so divine,  
 Demands my soul my life my all*

Jesus died for us - never mind what we were like. It isn’t a case of just identifying with him in dying but identifying with him in why he died. Why did he die - to redeem men and women - when we die we die for the same thing - that is our consuming desire

This is our challenge this morning. if you are a Christian this morning, then you are a disciple. Commitment is not an optional extra.

But I have my way of doing the Christian faith. In my old denomination we did things this way. It may not be perfect but I’m doing my faith this way. I do it my way. I believe what I believe my way. I do things MY Way. I want things My Way. These are the very words of Jesus “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Deny himself, follow Jesus. It grate on the world. It grate on Christians. We try to avoid it yet they are Jesus’ words and in addition

*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.*

Harsh words but challenging. Is Jesus ashamed of us this morning. Ashamed of our actions. Ashamed of our words. Ashamed of our inaction. These are Jesus’ words. Not mine. Their interpretation is just as you have it. Not subtle meanings. No mistakes. It’s not a passage for youth or budding missionaries - its’ for every believer, every disciple. In fact it isn’t anything about doing jobs in the church. It’s about following Jesus. Not the church, not the minister, not the Baptists. Following JESUS.

3 Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed..

As we come into communion it’s about our commitment. Let’s use the opportunity of the Lord’s table to come in repentance and worship Him afresh in denying ourselves, taking up His cross and following Him.

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