

The Dangerous Gospel

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When I think of “risk” or “danger”, I think grandiose, larger than life, beyond my ability. I think of the great missionary to India and pioneer of Protestant Missionary Movement, William Carey, who said: “*Attempt great things from God; expect great things from God.*” While this is an inspiring slogan, even biblical, many of us struggle to attempt even *mediocre* things for God. Why?

Why We Don't Risk

There are a variety of reasons we struggle to risk for the kingdom. One of those reasons is that we are surrounded by *minimized risk*—comfort, convenience, and a false sense of security to go with it. I wake up in my air-conditioned home, turn on my coffeemaker to make my coffee, sit down in my comfortable chair and then open the Word of God without a thought that any of it could be taken away at a moments notice. I glide on comfort. The comfort and convenience of my life give me a false sense of security. I unconsciously do the math and deduce that my money purchased all of this, and so I trust in vocational or financial gods to promote my false sense of security, all while calling myself a follower of Jesus.

When I'm on mission in the Majority World, in places like Kampala, Uganda or Mae Song, Thailand, I am constantly reminded that Christ is my security. I'm surrounded by discomfort and inconvenience. In rural Thailand, I woke up to the sound of Buddhist temple gongs going off and roosters cock-a-doodle-doing through the wee hours of the morning. I made my coffee with hot water and a portable paper strainer. There was no comfortable chair, only hard ground to sit on. When I opened the Word of God, I did so with a heightened (and realistic) sense of my need for God, the urgency of his mission, and the security that only Christ can provide.

Take Up Your Cross?

Jesus put risk like this: “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*” (Lk 9:23). Disciples are called to risk, to risk our lives, and to do it daily. This doesn't have to be grandiose. Here's why. In the Roman Empire it was ordinary for sentenced men to carry crosses to their execution. Why? Bearing the cross publically displayed a criminal's *submission* to the state, his humbling before the governing authorities. It's like wearing a sign that says: “You thought you could outwit the authorities, but we caught you and now you must humble yourself before us.” Taking up a cross, initially, isn't death; it is submission to the governing authorities. It's about submission not crucifixion.

Now, think about the implication for taking up *your* cross. For a disciple to take up his cross, then, is not merely an act of *self-denial* but, more importantly, *submission* to Jesus as your governing Authority, as your Lord. It is saying «no» to being your own authority, following yourself, and yes to Jesus' authority. No to your own will and yes to his will.

Where are you saying no, and how can you start saying yes? Perhaps you are saying no to your neighbors. No, you can't come over. No, you can't borrow my stuff. No you can't eat my food, and no, you can't hear the gospel! What if you reversed those nos to yeses? What if you actually submitted to Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18; Matt 19:19), and to not withhold any good from outsiders (Prov 3:17; 1 Pet 2:17)? You would start saying: Yes, you can come over. Yes, you can borrow my stuff. Yes, you can eat my food, and yes, let me tell you why—the generous gospel of grace!

The Dangerous Gospel

Is the gospel dangerous? Absolutely. It demands your life, submission to King Jesus instead of submission to self. In fact, it will actually call us to die to ourselves, and for some to even risk their lives. But the logic of the gospel is not denial for denial's sake. The gospel isn't ascetic or masochistic. Rather, the gospel is hedonistic; it offers *life* in death and *security* in risk.

Jesus follows his famous cost of discipleship call with a gospel of reward promise: "*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it*" (Lk 9:24). Lose your life, not just to lose it but also to *gain* it. Lose your life and you will *save* it. When we lose our lives *for Christ*, we gain our lives *in Christ*. What feels like sacrifice will become service. The gospel is dangerous because it asks for our whole life, but it also more secure than comfort because it gives you a real life. Jesus takes our whole life, but in exchange, he gives us a better one.

In the end, risk is actually minimized only in the gospel of Christ, because Jesus is the only one who can save us from death. If this is true, then mediocre, even grandiose risk is well within our ability. The Spirit of God wants to unleash disciples who take up their cross and submit to Jesus daily. His presence and power in each of us is just waiting to be released, as we turn in submission to Jesus Christ as our Lord. So go ahead, attempt some great things for God, knowing that God delights to do great things through us!