

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Life's Greatest Loss
Mark 8:34-9:1

Last week, we talked about Jesus. Taking a journey that was a 30-mile, 10-hour walk from the shore of Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. Asking his disciples, the penetrating question, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered for the group of 12 and confidently said, "You are the Christ."

This answer was correct but only half understood by His disciples. The disciples confessed Jesus as the Conquering King, but now they will struggle to understand the trail of tears Jesus would walk before them as the Suffering Servant. Revealing the fullness of the road the Messiah must walk because if the disciples continued to follow, they would walk the same road.

Mark 8:31-32

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly.

This morning's passage continues the conversation between Jesus and His disciples on that same road to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus takes the new revelation that He is both the Conquering King and the Suffering Servant and adds the shocking description of what road His disciples must walk.

Mark 8:34-9:1

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." 9 And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

The first verse frames our whole study this morning.

Mark 8:34

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For this significant moment, Jesus draws the crowds to himself. He plainly tells His disciples and the crowd what is required to follow Him. His invitation of “If anyone would to come after me” wasn’t just for the 12, it was for all the “whosevers” hearing his invitation. We sit here this morning as the “whosoevers” needing to consider both who the Savior is and the cost of following him.

Jesus gives three requirements. The first two, deny himself and take up his cross, are Greek verbs indicating a once-and-for-all, definite decision is to be made. A no turning back kind of decision. The third, follow me, is a present active imperative verb, which means following Him is the ongoing action.

The two decisive acts of denying self and shouldering our cross result in the continuous relationship lived out by following Jesus. Our daily focus is following Jesus because we have already made the decisions to deny self and carry our cross.

Let’s spend time really examining the following question. Who is the true disciple of Christ?

A. Who is the true disciple of Christ? The one who denies self.

Belief: Jesus commands a denial not of something but of someone...YOU! Jesus said, “let him deny himself”. The moment faith in Christ begins in a person, so does the lifelong journey of denying self. Salvation comes at our first confession of “no more” to self and “yes always” to Jesus. In that moment, we forever declare, “I am no longer the ruler of me, Jesus is now my life.”

But because we live in a sinful world, the old “me” wants to tempt me back to my old self-loving ways. Denying self is saying “no” to self-love, self-righteousness, self-determination. ... and every other self hyphenated word you can think of!

I can hear you saying, but Carey, “What does denying yourself mean in the most practical terms?” If you do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, it means turning to Him and receiving His gift of salvation. That one moment of trusting Jesus becomes your first moment of denying self. If you are a believer in Christ, Practically, it means your life is fully surrendered to Jesus. Fully means everything, total, all, entirety.

Think back to that moment you received Him as Savior and Lord? Did you understand that you were committing your life to Him? We must be careful not to become like the rich young ruler and saying to Jesus, “just tell me what to do or give up and I will do it.” The one who Denies self lives by the phrase, “Not I but Christ.”

Remember this command is a verb representing a once-for-all decision. A mentor of mine had a phrase that I hear in my heart almost everyday.

Belief: Victory is not me overcoming sin but rather Jesus overcoming me. If you want to know what layers of self to deny in your life, then ask Jesus. He will show you and convict you of everything in your heart and life that isn’t flowing from, to, or of Him.

Remember, Jesus is not asking for you to deny things, He is commanding you to deny YOU. All of You, so that He can be all of Him in you.

Why must denying self be required in following Jesus? Because you cannot save your life by protecting it.

³⁵ For whoever would save his life^[d] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

I was a lifeguard for 3 years. From my view as a lifeguard, I could never understand why the drowning person fought so hard to stay alive when I was right there to save them. I had full confidence in my ability to save them, but I couldn't save them until they wanted to be saved. Something was required before I could rescue them. They had to lose all confidence in their ability and place all confidence in mine. I couldn't save the one drowning until they gave up and believed they couldn't save themselves. It was then I could come to them and rescue them to safety.

In the same way we can't fight to live. This will only lead to death. But if we chose to lose all confidence in my ability to save our life, it is then we find the Savior's rescue. Because you cannot profit your soul by owning the world.

³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

The flesh longs for the things of the world but it comes at an eternal cost. To follow the world means to deny Christ. How many things of this world will endure the grave? None. How much of our mind, will, and emotions are spent in pursuit of worldly things? We think we own the world, but the truth is that the world owns us.

Philippians 3:7-9 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him...

B. Who is the true disciple of Christ? The one who takes up their cross.

Circle the word "cross" in verse 8:34. This is the first time the word "cross" is used in the gospel of Mark and it won't be used again until Mark 15, when Jesus picks up the cross of His own death. Jesus is making a strong statement of reality and clear expectations to us in that the first time he uses the word "cross," isn't referring to His cross on Golgotha's hill but the one we carry as we follow Him.

Belief: The true disciple of Christ understands and embraces the cross. The Roman Cross was a cruel, punishment tool for suffering, humiliation, and death. Because of Jesus, the cross we carry is an excruciatingly wonderful thing to bear.

1 Peter 4:13-14 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory^[b] and of God rests upon you.

Romans 6:5

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The cross we carry represents that we have committed our life to share in Christ's suffering, humiliation, and death. Why is taking up your cross required to follow Jesus? Because you cannot purchase redemption for your own soul.

Mark 8:37

For what can a man give in return for his soul?

The cross we carry represents our decisive commitment and full surrender to the One who paid for our redemption with His own blood. The worth of man's soul is more valuable than all the gold in the world, for he is made in God's image. Because God's word says that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood, God sent His only Son to die and give his holy blood for our unholy life.

God the Father has accepted the blood of Christ as the final and only needed payment for our sins. As we read this command to "take up your cross," we hear it in a domesticated way. We don't drive up and down Courtenay Boulevard and see crosses on the side of the road with criminals attached. Instead, we see crosses on church buildings, in jewelry of all kinds, on coffee mugs...you get the idea.

But these disciples and crowds heard it in a very raw, real way. They understood the brutal meaning of the cross. This wasn't figurative for them but a daily reality. And as bad as it in days of the disciples, it was even worse for the first generation of Christians in Rome.

Let's pause and look at this verse from a different view....the view of its original recipients of Mark's Gospel. Mark wrote his gospel to the Roman Christians who were going through persecution unlike what we can even imagine.

Remember that Jesus died and resurrected in about 33 AD. Nero was the Emperor of Rome from 54-68 AD. Ten years into his reign, some historians believe Nero caused a fire that ultimately consumed 80% of Rome. Some believe he did this to build a new palace for himself. Nero needed a scapegoat to blame and found it in a new religious sect that was causing him concern. Nero fed the lie that the Christians started the fire that destroyed Rome. Nero held no limit to his persecution of the Christians to appease the masses and his wicked appetite. They were brought into the Colosseum, fed to the lions, dipped into tar and ignited to illumine Nero's courtyard, and crucified on the side of the road in humiliating suffering.

The Christians are hiding in catacombs, fearing being caught and subject to only what the worst nightmares are made of. Imagine what it was like for these gentile believers in Rome to receive this first written record of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Imagine their reading for the first time the full account of Jesus' passion. Imagine the first time they read, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." They have chosen to deny themselves for the name of Jesus. They have chosen to take up their cross because of His gospel. This is exactly what they were doing!

Can you imagine the thrill, joy, and peace within their soul to know we are following Jesus just like he said. He suffered, was rejected, and died, just like He said. And He resurrected, just like He promised. We will follow him in his suffering, and we will follow him in his resurrection.

On this island, we do not know what it would be like to hide in catacombs, fearful of being fed to the lions or lifted up on the wooden cross. But the command is the same for us as it was for the disciples and first century Christians. Jesus is saying to us this morning on this island, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me."

C. Who is the true disciple of Christ? The one who follows Jesus.

Why follow Jesus? Because Jesus is our life's reason, confidence, and hope.

2 Timothy 1:12

which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

The disciple, Paul knew, the first century Christians in Rome all experienced the greatest loss ever, their own life, so that they could know the greatest gift ever...Jesus.

Our passage this morning concludes with two revelations from Jesus. Let's look at the last verse first.

1. Jesus reveals that some that were standing in front of him would not die before seeing the coming power of the Kingdom of God.

Mark 9:1

And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

The power of the Kingdom was what they wanted. Power of a conquering King to overthrow Rome's kingdom. In the context of the passage brings me to believe Jesus is not talking of His second coming, but rather the coming of his death, burial, resurrection, and then his return to walk among them for 40 days prior to ascension. He was telling

them that some of their eyes would see the Suffering Servant become the Conquering King and His Kingdom.

2. You cannot experience eternal life if you deny Jesus.

Mark 8:38

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Last week we talked about the moment that we as believers stand at the Judgment seat of Christ. We look forward to that moment in complete confidence and peace because we stand in the blood bought righteousness of Christ.

There is another judgment coming for those who do not know Christ. They too will stand before God's great white throne and him who seated on it. For those who have not placed their faith in the life of Christ, they stand with no hope.

To be ashamed and refuse Jesus, His words, and His gospel now has an eternal consequence. Eternity separated from Him and left to a death that never ends. To place your faith in Jesus now has an eternal consequence. Eternity with Christ and left to a life that never ends.

I leave you with two questions for you that hold eternal significance for your life.

1. Who do you say Jesus is?
2. Will you deny self, carry your cross, and follow Jesus?