

Good morning. Introduction-- Guest. Talk.

Thankful for in person church and for the chance to preach.

Open your Bible/ device to Mark 8:34-38// Pray

I have been reading through the book of Mark I have been struck by the simplicity of Jesus' call to his disciples to follow him. (The Chosen)

Jesus simply says "leave what you are doing and come with me. Right now. Follow me. And they did. Those he chose. Those he called. Followed. Simple call. Simple response. Even though they had very little understanding of what that actually meant.

Evidenced in the passage this morning. It's the first of 3 times in the book of Mark that Jesus *predicts his death* (31-33), the *disciples misunderstand what he is saying* and so Jesus has to *correct and teach them*.

Before we cast judgment on the ignorant disciples, lets be sure we too are clear on what it means to follow Jesus.

Do we know what it really looks like to follow the One we have given our life to.

In this passage, Jesus clearly and unapologetically expresses the requirements needed to follow him—to be his disciple subsequent to trusting in him.

So, let's read and take heed of the radical words of Jesus spoken 2,000 yrs. ago, but are just as relevant for us today.

Read **Mark 8: 34-38**

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. 35 For whoever would save his life 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."

Following Jesus

***Is a costly decision* (34)**

A quick honest assessment of the American church reveals that quite often it lacks real genuine followers. Far too often following Jesus for the American church is a cheap, materialistic, little devotion, me-centered brand of Christianity. IOW it looks like the culture more than the Bible. Cultural Christianity.

Certainly not what Jesus is explaining here.

Our understanding of following Jesus has to be biblically based rather than culturally driven. Coming to Jesus so you can live happily ever-after is more about the American dream than it is about the Gospel of Jesus.

We have immeasurable riches because of the gospel. Today.

Peace/ protection/ favor/ and being ridiculously blessed.

Eternally speaking, a believer in Jesus does live happily ever after. No matter what happens or doesn't happen here on earth—we live happily ever after—we ride off into the sunset in the perfect presence of Jesus- forever.

But that doesn't mean the road we are called to walk today is one of ease and comfort.

ONSCREEN Matt. 7:13-14 ¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Salvation is free. Following is not. A biblical faith is a costly faith. And we would be right to be concerned if our faith isn't costing us something.

OFF

Its costly because --following Jesus demands *denial* of yourself.

It's the idea of saying no to yourself. It's saying no to self-worship.

Every society engages in idol worship. Because we were created to worship.

But I think that the most common idol worship, is the worship of self. The exaltation of me at the expense of anyone and above anything else. I exist for me. Then we wonder why we have such a me-centered society. Look at me. Hear me. Praise me. Serve me. The idolatry of me.

Jesus knows what our default is and so he says the antidote to self-worship is denying self.

To say no to:

- Your agenda. Your heart. Your desires. Not that they are necessarily bad or wrong—they are just not the priority. Denying self means to acknowledge that following Jesus is first and foremost about Jesus and not me.

Jesus didn't die and defeat death to give us some type of consumer Christianity.

Following Jesus is first about what he demands—from us—our devotion, allegiance, our life.

It's about what he has called us to do for him. It's about what he says to lay down, give up, sacrifice, and then to give the glory to God the Father and not ourselves.

But, it also means to say no to:

- Your comfort and security. Our idea of following Jesus is far too safe.

Jesus never played it safe. Read—re-read the gospels.

Jesus was consistently taking calculated risks. He put himself out there.

With those who were opposed to his message and ministry. He was where he wasn't supposed to be; talking with those he wasn't supposed to talk to; Doing what his Father wanted at the expense of himself. Denying himself. He was not always safe and rarely comfortable.

Not safe according to the world's standard, but He was perfectly in the will of His father which meant he was in the safest place possible

We tend to be comfortably safe away from the world Jesus has saved us out of—but has also sent us back into. To engage with even at the expense of comfort and safety.

Jesus followers should be the greatest risk takers of all.

In the name of Jesus and at the expense of our reputation. Friendships. Comfort. Finances. Time. We should be risking it all for Jesus Christ.

Risking it to speak the name of Jesus, stand in the gap, to love, to forgive, and go, and do and be.. Not recklessly but obediently.

I think (true from my life), any apathy, lack of fervor, or passion that exists right now in your relationship with Jesus, may be a direct result of playing it safe and living the comfortable Christian life. Here on earth, a comfortable Christian life is contrary to a biblical follower of Jesus. Eternal rest is coming. But its not today.

But here is the cool thing—by the grace of God he provides we can say no to ourselves. And then through God’s grace: his agenda, his heart and his desires become ours. He is faithful to do it. See this isn’t try harder Christianity. What Jesus asks of us to do he provides what is needed for us to do it. His grace. Mercy. HS.

Deny yourself but...

➤ Jesus also says to take up your cross-- to carry *your cross*—daily.

Why is Jesus using this symbolism?

He wants them to know what kind of Messiah they are following. And how that directly impacts them. (31-32) (Like Father; like son) Like Jesus; like follower

And so, if denying yourself is to say no to yourself —carrying your cross is to say yes to God. It means saying yes to submission and suffering.

The condemned, as it has been portrayed many times, were required to carry the beam of the cross they were to die on. It was a very public, shameful, and hard death. And it’s clear picture of submission. The beam a representation of the will of another authority.

But Jesus was submitting to his Father’s will. He willingly and joyfully submitted. And Jesus says to his followers do the same--willingly pick your cross. Willingly say yes and submit to God’s authority –carry your cross today. Every day.

Submit in order for God’s will to be done in the world. Through you. **Matt. 6:10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

What we don’t realize, is that with submission to God’s will, comes the potential for suffering. Jesus’ is trying to get his disciples to understand that submission will bring with it what he himself experienced. Suffering. If he is to suffer—then they will.

Suffering discomfort, rejection, ridicule or resistance. But not suffering just to suffer. **The Psalmist says in chap. 119: 67;71 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.**

How is God calling you to submit? Cross the ocean. Cross the street. Befriend. Love. Give away—money, time, treasure. Join a community of believers-- putting yourself out there and letting people in.

Deny and die. Doesn’t look great in a pretty brochure promoting Christianity. But they are requirements to truly following Jesus. Following Jesus is costly.

It will cost you. But it’s so worth it. Because he is so worth it.

The joy of knowing Jesus is far greater than the discomfort of self-denial.

The joy of submitting to Christ is far greater than me dying to my will.

The joy of suffering for my Lord and Savior is far greater than my comfort and ease I try to pursue.

Following Jesus

Won’t make sense to the world (35-37)

35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

It’s counterintuitive and countercultural. Jesus didn’t come to turn the world upside down—it already is. He came to turn it right side up. He came to introduce the economy of his Kingdom. He came to expose how the world’s striving is not just wrong but *deadly*.

Being a true follower of Jesus won’t make sense to the watching and perishing world around you. We struggle to make sense of it. It’s paradoxical. Keeping you lose. Losing you gain. **35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.**

We know the world’s mantra is ‘get all you can, while you can’. “Get while the getting is good.”

If the point of your life is your life--you will waste it. You lose.

If the point of your life is Jesus—you have invested it well. You will have used your life for God’s glory and kingdom. And it safe and secure for all eternity.

If the point of your life is your success, your name, your reputation, your kingdom—all you will get IS this world. And the second your time here is over you have not just lost the spoils of the world, you have wasted your life bringing with it eternal consequences. **36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?** Not good. Devastatingly bad. Winning in this world is losing in the next. Losing here is winning with Jesus in eternity.

Your life is far more precious than all that the world has to offer.

37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? NOTHING!

The giving of your soul/life to the world is a bad deal that only leads to eternal bankruptcy. You will exchange what is priceless (your soul) with what is worthless (this world). And there is no way to purchase it back. Multiple ways Jesus is driving home the fact that denying and dying brings real life today.

Keeping you lose. Losing you gain. Doesn’t make sense. But it will. It will make perfect sense when we step into eternity.

And it’s so worth it. Because he is so worth it.

The joy of salvation is far greater than gaining what you can’t keep anyway.

The joy of being a citizen of God’s Kingdom is far greater than being a little strange to the world around us.

The joy that comes from being unattached to this world far outweighs chasing that which you can’t catch.

Following Jesus

Requires complete allegiance to Jesus (38)³⁸ *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*"

Serious words by Jesus. Fearful truths.

Being ashamed. Embarrassed. Instead of denying self—it's denial of Jesus.

To be ashamed of Jesus is to retain our allegiance to an adulterous and sinful world.

How ridiculous. That a follower would choose the world instead Jesus. It's not just asinine to do such a thing—its *dangerous*. Because the consequences are dire. Our embarrassment and denial of Jesus *here* has serious implications for the *future*.

Jesus says, if you live ashamed of me before men who already despise me, I will deny you when I come with those who worship me (holy angels).

He is coming again. But he will be coming again in judgment. He will stand in judgment over anyone who has denied and rejected him.

Fearful truths. Who do we fear more—man or God?

Our silence many times answers that question. Why is it the church is far too silent in proclaiming its allegiance to Jesus? The most important person to walk this earth. The cornerstone of our existence. Our first love. Our Redeemer. Savior.

QUOTE onscreen

"We fear men so much — because we fear God so little. One fear cures another. When man's terror scares you — turn your thoughts to the wrath/ judgment of God." William Gurnall 1617-1679 puritan, pastor and author

A healthy fear of God (not just awe, but fear of who God is and what we deserve) should always trump an irrational fear of man.

OFF—return to third point

Complete allegiance. Before all men. We deny ourselves so that we don't deny Jesus with our mouth and life.

➤ Funerals: I've done a few funerals over the years for people that I don't personally know. I know their family just not the individual who died. Most importantly, I don't know whether they were a follower of Jesus or not. So, I have to rely on those who know them the best. But it's never a good thing when there's hesitation after the question of "did they know Jesus?"

Following Jesus means living a life that prevents anyone from hesitating when asked about you and Jesus. Now or later. That's my hope for me.

Following after Jesus was never meant to be a private matter A private faith is not a biblical faith.

Oh, that the world will know us as followers of Jesus.

I don't mean a church goer. Or a nice person. Or religious. Or a person of faith. I mean an unashamed follower of Jesus Christ.

To live in this world unashamed of Jesus means

- You are different than the world (adulterous and sinful generation)

Simply because you are filled with the HS—which means...

You have hope more than fear. You have joy more than worry. You have love more than hate. You extend forgiveness instead of revenge. You offer prayer more than platitudes. Your perspective is more biblical than political.

They know you are different but...

- They know *why* you are different.

Unlike the world, you take zero credit for your life.

- Family, friends, coworkers, all know that your life has nothing to do with you and everything to do with Jesus.
- They know your story of God's redeeming love. (30 sec. 3 min. 30 min.). People have heard you speak about your sin and God's grace. They have heard you share about when you repented and trusted in the saving work of Jesus on the Cross on your behalf.
- They know there is no good in you apart from Jesus.

It only happens when we deny our self and make our whole life Jesus—"to live is Christ" When it is...you can't help but speak of him. You share the good news of him. You share how he has changed you. You share the joy he has placed within you.

We should be known as followers of Jesus—not arrogantly or self-righteously. But before anything else (political party, movement, sports team, hobby, etc.) out of humility and grace-- people should know that our allegiance is to Christ and Christ alone.

Complete allegiance to Jesus. It comes with sweet joy.

The joy of being identified with Jesus is far greater than being counted as one with the world.

The joy of sharing the Good News is far greater than remaining silent out of fear of man. The joy of someone understanding and receiving the gospel because of knowing you.

The joy of being known by Christ when he returns is incomparable to living as an outcast in this world.

Following Jesus is a costly decision, it won't make sense to the world, and it requires complete allegiance... but it's so worth it. Because he is so worth it.

Let's pray.