
Take Up Your Cross - Mark 8:34-38

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Our Church wants to do a better job of making disciples.

- We see being Disciples of Christ, and in turn making more Disciples of Christ as our great commission, one thing that we must get right if we are to be a God honouring Church.

Disciple comes from the Greek word for “pupil” or “learner”

- In its most intense form, discipleship talks of a total commitment to stay close to and obey the person chosen as one’s teacher.

Does that help you to think a little more intelligently about Jesus’ disciples?

- These were men who had a total commitment to stay close to Jesus, and to obey him as their teacher.

Using this definition, are you a disciple of Jesus?

- A total commitment to stay close to and obey Jesus as your teacher?
- A person who rejects discipleship will never know what their life could have been as a follower of his ways with the help of his Holy Spirit.

Before you jump at a chance to be a disciple of Jesus, will you stop to consider the cost?

- Today’s message will help us all to see the cost of being a disciple of Jesus
- We will also take into consideration the gains and losses that come with being a disciple of Jesus.
- The conclusion that I believe is inevitable is that following Jesus as his devoted Disciple will result in our lives gaining an incredible freedom, joy and love, and the price tag of a life in God’s service is worth it every time.

We are taking our study from the book of Mark, which has 16 chapters in it. The first 8 chapters seem to be focused on “Who is Jesus?”

The answer comes in Mark 8:29

²⁹ “But you,” He asked them again, “who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered Him, “You are the ‘Messiah!’”

Here is what Mark’s audience and the Disciples would have immediately thought of with the word, “Messiah”.

-“A future deliverer and savior who would rescue his people and usher in a time of prosperity and blessing.” - The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary

In the minds of the Jewish community, the Messiah would be a King, come to free them from the oppression of Rome.

- It comes as a major shock when the very next thing Jesus says is that he is going to Jerusalem to die a criminal's death at the hands of the Jewish authorities, and that he would rise on the third day.
- Peter immediately rebukes Jesus, this isn't the kind of Messiah that Peter is expecting.

A Saviour who must suffer

From the beginning, the suffering and rejection of Jesus has been a tough pill for his followers to swallow.

- This thought has grown less offensive over time, as our understanding has grown, but still the idea of a suffering saviour is hard.
- ex. Think about this in political terms. What nation would want to see their political leaders beaten, tortured and publicly executed?
 - We would be outraged, we would sense their absolute helplessness and weakness.

This experience is the exact one that Jesus has predicted for himself. Peter rebukes him, and Jesus accuses Peter of having the devils intentions in mind, instead of God's.

The next thing that happens is this,

Mark 8:34 (HCSB)

³⁴ Summoning the crowd along with His disciples, He said to them, "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.

The invitation to follow Jesus is open to anyone who hears his voice, this is not only for the 12 chosen disciples.

- The invitation to follow Jesus is still open to us, and to all this very day.
- You don't have to follow Jesus, but if you follow Jesus you do have to deny yourself and take up your cross.

Peter wanted to have the Messiah on Peter's terms.

- A king, ruling with power and strength over the enemies.
- But Jesus is saying to Peter, you are going to have to do this on my terms, and do it my way.
- There are those today who still want to negotiate with Jesus, and have him as their King but on their own terms.
 - You can be King, but here are my conditions, here is what I need you to do, here is how you need to function in my life.
 - That's not compatible with the rule of God in your life. ***You don't get to go to God and say, I submit my life to you and here are my conditions.***
 - No one should become a Disciples of Jesus for their own personal agenda, instead, we are disciples of Jesus because we believe in his agenda and his rule, and we are submitted to it.

“Take Up Your Cross” would have sounded different 2000 years ago then it does today.

- It's become a flowery metaphor for us today.
 - But try to imagine that saying in the ears of the Jewish audience.

“Take Up Your Cross” would have sounded like an invitation to come and die.

- Crucifixion was called “The Extreme Penalty” and was reserved for the worst criminals, the ones who needed to be made an example of.

It was a very public act, to take up a cross. This wasn't a private declaration that you and those who knew you best were only aware of.

- This was agreeing to be put on display in front of the world, as being with Christ in his suffering and rejection.

Why would anybody want this? What rational could possibly be given for anyone to be willing to subject themselves to this?

- Friendship with God, salvation, Christian community, eternal life, freedom in this life from sin, the sovereign rule of a loving and Holy God influencing your every day, shaping your life into one of divine beauty and holiness, for your good and God's glory.

The cross is not the end to all of your happiness, joy and contentment, instead, it stands at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. (Bonhoeffer)

But Jesus' invitation does not start with the cross, instead it begins with denying self. What is Jesus talking about here?

Denying Self is not the same as Self Denial.

- Jesus asks us to deny ourselves.
- But we tend to think of self-denial instead
 - when for a period of time we give up things or activities that we enjoy
- Denying Self is when we surrender ourselves fully to Christ and determine to obey him in everything that we do.
 - that decision that initially make when we decide to follow Jesus is then affirmed in our lives daily, as we give each day to God to do with us whatever he thinks best.

As a society, we are very good at the practice of self-denial for the sake of personal gain.

- For the sake of business - late nights, overtime, loyalty to company, hard work, etc
- For the sake of sports - eat right, train hard, sleep right, financial investment
- For the sake of pleasure - you save up all year for vacation, or to get a car, or whatever it is brings you pleasure. You do with some unpleasantness now, so you can have pleasure later.

What does it look like to Deny Yourself and follow Jesus?

- What suffering will you endure for Jesus' mission?
- What cost will you pay to further his message
- What sacrifice have you made? Are you living the life of one who has denied themselves?

There is more to denying ourselves than suffering and restraint. Even more importantly, Jesus also speaks to our identity.

- How do people identify you? Is it through your career, your family, your achievements, your baking, your looks?
- On a more personal level, how do you identify yourself? What makes up who you are as a person?

To Deny Ourselves means that we willingly lay down our identity so that we can identify with Jesus.

- This is easier said than lived.
 - Your identity can't be based on your success as mom or dad
 - Your identity can't be based on your friendships
 - Your identity can't be based on your own work
 - Your identity can't be based on your social media skills and posts

Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

The order is important. We deny ourselves SO THAT we can take up our cross.

- In saying, "My life is not about me, it is all about you" we find ourselves on the path with Jesus to the cross; for this is the true journey of all who will follow him.

We need to look first at why the cross was necessary for Jesus, to understand why it is also necessary for those who will follow him.

Mark 8:31 (HCSB)

³¹ Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, be killed, and rise after three days.

There are some very important words and phrases in this verse.

SON OF MAN -

-This is one of Jesus' favourite titles for himself, and it refers directly to Daniel 7. In this passage The Son of Man is one who is given authority over every people group, tribe and nation on the earth, and is the ruler of an everlasting Kingdom that will not pass away.

So Jesus takes that picture, and then says that The Son of Man MUST suffer. MUST is an important word, it was absolutely necessary that Jesus suffer, and be rejected and die.

- this is really at the heart of the Good News of Jesus - Real Love, Real Justice, Real Power.
- Real Love - Jesus giving himself completely, emptying himself fully, in an act of love to make it possible for us to love, and to see what true love really is.
- Real Justice - God's holiness demands a full payment of sin, our own sinfulness makes us God's enemies and incapable of every affording the price of sin on our lives.
- Jesus suffering, rejection and death is the only way that we can ever be forgiven sins, and ever be able to truly and freely forgive others their sins against us.
- Real Power - Power in the hands of sinful always ends up with unfair exploitation and inequality.
 - As fallen mankind, we are simply unable to use power in a way that serves others well. This has been proven over and over in fallen empire after fallen empire.
 - But when Jesus goes to the cross, he defeats all power and all authority, and now is enthroned with real power to save the oppressed,
 - and as his followers, that power and that mission extends to us.

These 3 reasons are the primary ones why for Jesus to be Lord of all, suffering and being rejected were absolutely necessary.

We must be prepared to also take up our cross, embracing the suffering and rejection that comes with it, so that in Christ we can know and share real love, real justice and real power.

When Jesus said, "Take up your cross", it was not an established Jewish metaphor, but it worked well because everybody understood the concept.

- It brought to mind the image of a condemned person who was forced to show their submission to Rome by publicly carrying their cross throughout the city to the place of execution.
- To take up your cross means submissive obedience to the authority against whom you had previously rebelled.
- Our sin has made us enemies of God, Rebels against the established authority of his rule, taking up our cross will then symbolize our submission to God.

Make no mistake about it, Taking up your cross is saying that you will be with Jesus in both suffering and rejection, this is not an empty promise.

- The suffering and rejection are not those that come as a result of living a human life on earth. Everyone has that.
- As followers of Christ, we endure suffering and rejection that comes from being identified as His follower, we suffer for his name.

- This ties in really well with Pastor Shafer's current sermon series, and especially the section on 1 Corinthians 6, which is where we will be the next time that he preaches.
- The theme is robust, and all throughout the New Testament, and for the sake of time, I'm only going to touch on a couple of key points.

Forgiving sins is part of suffering

Sin comes with a very heavy price tag. It demands payment in full, and its consequences ripple out in ways that we could never fully anticipate.

- Jesus took the full wrath of God on his own self as he hung on the cross, it crushed our saviour, and that suffering was greater than any physical pain that he also endured.
- But it still costs us, Jesus followers, to forgive sin.
 - it costs us in bearing the consequences of our brother and sister's sin, and yet still forgiving them. There is a cost passed on to the church.
 - It costs us in humility, we must give up power and leverage over those who have sinned against us, and we can no longer hold it against them.

Yet, without forgiveness, the suffering of sin is enough to crush us all. Forgiveness through Jesus Name is our only hope, and though it results in reconciliation, saved lives and relationships, it still comes at a cost, there is still a cross to take up.

A culture that is opposed to suffering

Suffering is very counter cultural, we generally speaking want to avoid it at all costs.

- But have you ever counted the cost of avoiding suffering
- How about in relationships. The only real way to avoid pain and suffering, is to not have deep relationships. The more a person knows you, the more they can hurt you.
 - The cost, shallow relationships with people who barely know you.
- How about the cost of not suffering in Church life?
 - Many times those in the church would prefer to leave a church rather than to endure some suffering.
 - The cost is huge both personally and corporately.
 - On a personal level, people are not able to develop real community and real roots that will carry them through life's storms.
 - People leave churches over every kind of suffering, and we are all weaker because of it.

Taking Up Your Cross is the only way to overcome Suffering.

We don't suffer in vain, anticipating an eternity of suffering. We suffer now, knowing that Jesus is on the throne, working all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

- Suffering for the sake of suffering is just pain for the sake of pain.

Hebrews 12:7 (HCSB)

⁷ Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?

Hebrews 12:11 (HCSB)

¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the fruit of peace and righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Suffering for the sake of Peace & Righteousness, that makes sense.

This is what Jesus did, although not even Jesus looked for or asked for suffering in his life.

Matthew 26:39 (HCSB)

³⁹ Going a little farther, He fell facedown and prayed, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will."

Matthew 26:42 (HCSB)

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done."

The cup of suffering finally did pass from Jesus, but only through his drinking it. He had to go through it, to overcome it. What are we, his followers, left with now? An open door for peace and righteousness with God on a personal and corporate level. But will we drink the cup of suffering, or will we walk away at the approaching discomfort.

Jesus continues on in this invitation to follow him by giving some very good arguments for why it makes sense to follow him.

Mark 8:35–37 (HCSB)

³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me and the gospel will save it. ³⁶ For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life? ³⁷ What can a man give in exchange for his life?

Do you see the word "life" at the end of vs 36 and 37?

- Sometimes the word is incorrectly translated to "soul", which leads us to think about life after death, instead of life here and now.
- What Jesus is saying applies to who we are now AND in the light of eternity.

It's from the Greek word "psyche" where we get our word Psychology from.

- The word can be best understood as "your identity, your personality, what it is about you that makes you distinct and valuable.

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Remember that Jesus stated mission in life was to make it so that his followers could have life MORE abundantly. He's not interested in us LOSING our lives so much as he is in us finding ourselves in Jesus.

It's about our identity. About what makes us who we are. It's not your looks, your expertise, your humour or your skill that makes you valuable. And if it's those things that you hold on to, you are eventually going to lose it all. Those are all things that none of us is guaranteed for tomorrow.

Yet these are the exact things that our society says make us valuable and worthwhile. Jesus is saying, if your life is lived for those accolades, you will actually forfeit it all. But if your life is lived for me, I have the love, the justice and the power to make it so that my followers will gain it all.

1st Argument - Look at your best case scenario without Christ.

- Maybe you pull it all off and you are able to gain the world. You actually earn all of those things that you are working so hard for? Where is the value if you do all that, but forfeit your life, your identity, your personality, the things about you that make you valuable and distinct.
- And is it worth it to earn all of those things in your name, while not following Christ? Some say yes, but one day they learn that if you don't have Jesus, you don't have anything, and if you do have Jesus, then what more could you ever ask for.

2nd Argument - What can you get in exchange for a life?

- There is nothing of more value than a human life in the world. Nothing else is created in the image of God.
- It follows then to ask, "What can a man give in exchange for his life?"
- If Jesus is the only way to save your life, then what else could matter so much to you to choose not to follow him.
- These claims can only be made by a Saviour and King who knows the end.

Mark 8:38 (HCSB)

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus is God, and Jesus is speaking truth as The Word of God made flesh.

- We need to take him very seriously here.
- On that day, I don't want to have Christ be ashamed of me, or of you.

There is only one choice that we can make then, Follow Christ. Deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ.

I'll close with this quote from Dallas Willard in his book, "The Divine Conspiracy."

“When Jesus says those who find their soul will lose it, he means those who think they are in control of their life will one day find that they definitely are not in control. Instead, they are totally at the mercy of forces beyond them and even within them. They are on a sure course toward disintegration and powerlessness, toward lostness both to themselves and to God.

But if in remorse and repentance they give up doing only what they want—if they give up their attempt to be the ultimate reference point in their life—there is hope. If they choose to lose their life in favour of God’s life—for the sake of Jesus and his ongoing world revolution of character—then their soul (their life) will be preserved and given back to them.”