

Jesus Will Cost You Everything!

Mark 8:34-38

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Well, this morning I invite you to turn to a text that is not a traditional Resurrection Sunday text. Turn with me to Mark 8, Mark 8. A year before His death and resurrection our Lord took His disciples twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee to one of the northernmost parts of Israel to a community called Caesarea Philippi. It was there that Peter made that famous confession, on his behalf and on behalf of the disciples, in response to Jesus' question, "'Who do you say that I am?'" Peter said of Jesus, "'You are [*the Messiah*] the Christos [*the Anointed One*]. You are the Son of the Living God.'"

In response to that confession of the truth of who He was, Jesus decided that it was time for Him to tell His disciples what was going to happen. Here He makes an amazing prediction. For the first time, in Mark 8, Jesus told His disciples plainly what was going to happen to Him. Look at verse 31, "And He began to teach them," literally, the Greek text says, "that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer many things, to be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes." The Jewish Sanhedrin, the leaders of the nation of Israel, would assess Jesus' claims and they would willfully, deliberately reject Him.

Verse 31 goes on, "and be killed." Notice, He doesn't say "and die." "And be killed," that implies a violent death. This was a year before the events of this weekend unfolded. Because He mentions a violent death and yet Israel's leaders didn't have the power to execute anyone, Jesus was clearly predicting that the Romans would become involved in His death as well. And then He says, "and after three days rise again." Do you see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying that He came on a divine mission that was absolutely necessary. He had to suffer, He had to die, and He had to be raised from death.

Now, the apostle Peter was offended by the very concept of God's Son giving His life and so he rebukes our Lord. In turn, our Lord rebukes Peter. Later Jesus would explain why this was necessary. In chapter 10 verse 45, He says, "'the Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom in the place of many.'" Jesus came to offer His life as the payment to God for the sins of those who would believe in Him, so that God could forgive them, so that God could "be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus."

But here in this context, in the context of this prophecy about His death and resurrection, Jesus tells us the extraordinary, even shocking way that He expects every one of us to respond, to the events that we celebrate this weekend. He said, if you want to benefit from My mission, if you

want the spiritual benefits my death and resurrection accomplished, (Are you ready for this?) it will cost you everything. Let's read what he says, verse 34,

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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' statements in these verses are the direct antithesis of the pop Christian gospel that is preached in churches all around our country and around the world today. In fact, John Stott writes,

The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers – the ruins of those who began to build, but were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called "nominal Christianity." In countries [*like our own*] in which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved, enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to fit their convenience.

This is the pop Christian gospel that is taught all around us. Raise your hand, pray a prayer, put the date in the front of your Bible, sign a card, walk an aisle, and that's all you have to do and you're in. Just pocket your life insurance policy and then you can live however you want. And God will have to take you, because after all, once saved, always saved. Contrast that kind of cheap grace or easy believism to Jesus' words that we have just read together. These are words as revolutionary today as they were in the first century.

I want us to look at what our Lord said, together. Notice, first of all, to whom He spoke these words, verse 34, "He summoned the crowd with His disciples." This crowd was just like the rest of the crowds that attached themselves to Jesus in the first century. Most of them had some interest in Jesus, although often it was for purely selfish reasons, for what they could get from Jesus. Undoubtedly, there were a few truly interested in spiritual things in this crowd, but had not yet come to embrace Jesus as Lord. But understand that a large part of the crowd consisted of unbelievers. So, Jesus spoke these words then to unbelievers.

But both Mark and Matthew tell us that Jesus also spoke these words to His disciples. In fact, Luke summarizes it in Luke 9:23 by saying, “He was saying to all of them.” Now, this is really important to us because it means that Jesus’ message here is important both for unbelievers and for believers, because Jesus tells us here how the true Christian life begins and how it always continues. Look at verse 34, “He summoned the crowd with His disciples and He said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me.’” That expression “‘come after Me’” is often used literally of the 12 disciples, the 12 apostles following Jesus in a literal sense, down the road, they came after Him. And so, it came to be used metaphorically for following Jesus in the sense of becoming His true disciple.

And don’t be confused, in the Gospels everyone who comes to Him for salvation, for forgiveness of sin, also becomes His disciple. For example, Luke 14:26 says, “‘If anyone comes to Me.’” That is a universal expression in the gospel for coming to Jesus for spiritual salvation, for rescue from one’s sins, for forgiveness. “‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own life, he cannot be My disciple.’” You see, Jesus equates the two, to come to Jesus for salvation is to become His disciple.

There’s a terribly mistaken idea that’s very popular here in the Dallas area, that you get saved by accepting Jesus as Savior. Then later, when you’re ready, when you’ve done things that you want, you can become a disciple then, and then you can accept Him as Lord. They would say that here Jesus means Christians, real Christians just need to take the next step and become a disciple as well. But that can’t be what Jesus meant, for two reasons. First of all, you remember the great commission, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, “‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’” Did you see that? The Christian mission is to make disciples, then to baptize them, then to teach them to follow Christ. So, becoming a disciple is the same thing, to use expressions we often use, as getting saved.

Also, if you look at all five passages in the Gospels where these same expressions are used that are used in the text we’re studying this morning, Jesus always made the same contrast in that context. He makes a contrast between forfeiting your soul and saving your soul. Jesus is talking here about spiritual salvation. So understand, to come to Jesus, to come after Him, to become His disciple, to be saved, to be forgiven, to receive eternal life, all identify exactly the same spiritual event. When a person comes to Christ in faith and repentance, seeking forgiveness, seeking spiritual rescue from his sins, seeking eternal life, he becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, or a disciple. That’s what Jesus is talking about in this passage.

Now, Jesus’ point is although salvation is all of grace, there’s nothing we can do to earn it, to come to Jesus, to receive the free gift of salvation, will cost you everything. Notice verse 34, “‘If anyone wishes [*or wills*] to come after Me,’” to be my disciple, to have the benefit of my death and resurrection, “‘he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.’” Jesus here

gives three conditions for becoming His disciple. Now, these conditions aren't new, in fact, they are just Jesus' way of explaining the two conditions that are everywhere set forth as the condition for salvation: true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. These three conditions are just Jesus' unique way of putting those same two basic conditions for salvation.

Let's look at them together. The first condition that Jesus lays down is, "he must deny himself." "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself." Now, far and away the primary way this Greek word deny is used in the New Testament is of Peter's denial of Christ on the night of His arrest. In the same way that Peter denied Christ, you and I are to deny ourselves. You see, the word means to renounce, to refuse to associate with, to have nothing to do with, to sever your relationship with. R. T. France writes, "Self-denial," as Jesus teaches it here, "is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for Lent. It is not the denial of something to the self, it is the denial of the self."

Jesus says if you want to become a disciple, you have to renounce yourself, you have to renounce the person that you've been, you have to no longer want to have anything to do with yourself. This is what in other places is called repentance. It's a willingness to turn from all that you are and all that you've been. It's like saying to Christ. Lord, I am coming to You and there's nothing in me I want to salvage; there's nothing in me worth keeping. In the first beatitude, as Jesus lays out the path to true salvation, how does He describe it? He says, the very first step in the process of the work of the Spirit in the heart is, "Blessed are [the beggars] the poor in spirit," the beggars in spirit. You come to God saying, God I have nothing you want, there's nothing in me that's salvageable. I come as a beggar. And to them, Jesus says, belongs "the kingdom of heaven."

If you want to a powerful picture of what this renouncing of oneself looks like, you have it in the story Jesus tells in Luke 18:13, where he talks about the tax collector who comes to the temple. This terrible sinner, he comes to the temple, and "standing some distance away," Jesus says, "he was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but he was beating his chest saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner."'" He was renouncing himself. John Broadus, American commentator from the 1800's, writes, "The follower of Christ will not have self for his ruler or his aim. He must resolve to live not for pleasure, but usefulness. Not for inclination," that is, what he wants, "but for duty. Not for self, but for God."

Listen, if you want to come to Christ for salvation. If you want the forgiveness that He purchased in His death and resurrection, you have to come as a beggar with nothing to offer Him. And, if you come saying, you know, I've got some things that I think Christ will like and He'll accept me on behalf of, then He's not going to accept you. He says, if you want to come to Me, you must renounce, deny yourself. For us who are already Jesus' disciples, this is a great reminder that we must continue to renounce everything about ourselves. Obviously, our sin, but

also our own desires, our ambitions, our plans. We must value Jesus more than we value ourselves. This is what He demands.

The second condition that Jesus demands from those who want to enjoy the benefits of His crucifixion and resurrection, He says in verse 34, “he must take up his cross.” Luke tells us in Luke 9:23 that Jesus added, “he must take up his cross daily.” You see, the Christian life begins at salvation by taking up your cross and it continues by carrying it every day for the rest of your life. Now, there’s a lot of sentimentality that’s been read into this expression. Let me tell you, Jesus does not mean here that you need to bear some trouble or burden throughout your life. Your cross is not some illness that you have. It is not a wayward child. It is not a difficult spouse. It’s not your mother-in-law. The Jews of Jesus’ day were very familiar with the cross. Under the Roman occupation of Palestine they had seen thousands crucified. The Romans left them on the main thoroughfares for all to see, and as a preventative against crimes against Rome. So when Jesus mentioned the cross, the only thing that came to their minds was execution and death.

Jesus’ point was that if you want to come to Him for salvation, if you want to become His disciple, you not only have to renounce yourself, you must value Him more than you do your own life. He puts it this way in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother.” Now, you have to read the word hate here in contrast to our love. Our love for Christ should be so strong that it makes our love for the people in our lives look like hate. “If anyone does not come to Me and hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” If you don’t hate your life, if you don’t love Christ so much, if you aren’t so committed to Him, that it makes your love for yourself look like hate, Jesus said, “you cannot be My disciple.”

To come to Jesus you have to be willing to physically lay down your life for Him. You remember Paul in Acts 21:13, Paul said, “I am ready even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Now, you hear that and we’re all tempted to say, yeah, but that was Paul. Okay. Let’s talk about some ordinary Christians who will live in the time of the tribulation. John writes of them in Revelation 12:11, “they did not love their life even when faced with death.” But most Christians throughout the history of the church have not been martyred and most of us will not be martyred. So, what does it mean for us? Taking up our cross not only means that we’re willing to die for Christ, but it means a constant willingness to bear the shame that comes with being a follower of Jesus Christ. We may not lose our lives, but we will lose something for following Christ.

William Hendrickson, the great Presbyterian commentator, writes, “He voluntarily,” that is, the believer, “voluntarily accepts the pain, shame, and persecution that is going to be his particular lot because of his loyalty to Christ and His cause.” It will cost you to be a Christian, that’s what Jesus is saying. And you must be willing to pay that cost. If not death, what does it mean? Turn

to Luke 6. Luke reminds us that it isn't always death that means carrying our cross for Christ. It means other things as well. Luke 6:22,

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

Jesus says, prepare for it, you will be persecuted for Me, for my sake, and you must be willing to bear it. John 15:20, Jesus says to His followers, "A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

We see this unfolding in its worst and most extreme forms on the front pages of our newspapers today. You've read, I'm sure, that when ISIS takes over cities and villages they often spray paint the Arabic letter "n" on the homes of Christians, marking them out. So the Arabic letter "n" has become, world-wide, a symbol of the cost that comes with following Jesus Christ. Fortunately, we are not yet to that point in our country, but tragically even in our own country it is becoming increasingly costly to be a real Christian, to be a true obedient follower of Jesus Christ. It may cost you. It may cost you your reputation. It may cost you your job. It may cost you that promotion. It may cost you in some other way. It may cost you friendships. It may cost you ridicule and being ostracized and insulted. Jesus demands that we value Him more than our lives, more than our reputation, more than our comfort, our peace, our prosperity. You must take up your cross every day.

There's a third condition for benefiting from the death and resurrection of Jesus, verse 34 says, "if anyone would come after Me, he must follow Me." It's a pretty straightforward statement, "follow me." Obviously, it means that you must leave your own way, your own path, and walk in His path. That's the picture behind this word. It means to submit your will to His. It means to acknowledge that He is your master and you are His slave, to use one of the most common pictures in the New Testament. There are a lot of things we could say about this. The command to follow Jesus certainly means that you must be willing to put Jesus and His Kingdom first in your life's decisions. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 6:33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness." It also means we must be willing to serve Jesus wherever He wants, doing whatever He wants.

David Livingston, the famous missionary who braved Africa for Christ, is famous for this prayer. He said, "Lord send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever any ties but the ties that bind me to your service and to your heart." I remember the first time I said that to Jesus Christ. I was in a hospital room, my junior year of college. For me, saying that meant changing my major shortly thereafter from law to Bible. For you, saying it may not mean that there is a radical change, you may stay in the same profession, the same job,

the same community, the same church, but say it and mean it you must. Have you ever said that to Christ?

But primarily, when Jesus says “follow me,” primarily He means that you must be willing to obey His commands in the Scripture, to own Him as Lord and Teacher. This is what He says in John 13 on the night of the Lord’s Supper. He says, “you call Me Teacher and Lord,” teacher and master, “and you are right, for so I am.” And “a slave is not greater than his master.” He says, I’m the master and the teacher, you are my students, and you are my slaves. To follow Jesus means becoming His student and learning from Him. It means becoming His slave and obeying what He commands in the Scripture. Calling Jesus your Lord and failing to do what He commands is nonsensical. It’s completely incongruous. Jesus said, in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call Me, “Lord, Lord” and not do the things which I say?” It doesn’t make any sense. Jesus demands that we value His will more than we value our own will.

Now, notice those three conditions, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Those are really just Jesus’ explanation of what true repentance and faith look like. You see, to gain salvation, to gain the salvation Jesus purchased by His death and His resurrection, will cost you everything. Why should you be willing to pay such a high price? Well, very quickly, in the next four verses our Lord explains, using the language of profit and loss. Jesus says, listen, do the math and you will conclude that the high cost of discipleship is worth it.

First of all, it’s worth it because it’s the only way to save your soul. Verse 35, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s, will save it.” You see, you can try to save your life for yourself. You can say, you know, I just don’t like the high cost of following Jesus. There are things I want to do. There are pleasures I want to pursue. There are things I want to enjoy. I’m just not willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. You can say that. And Jesus says, if you make that choice, you may gain some pleasure in this life, but you will lose your soul forever.

On the other hand, you can choose to meet these conditions, you can deny yourself, you can take up your cross and follow Jesus, you can repent and believe in Him, and you will lose your selfish, self-focus, self-absorbed life. You will lose your own ambitions, your own plans, your own dreams. Instead, you will spend your life doing what matters to Jesus Christ. You will lose your life here in devotion to Christ, but you will save your life forever. Jim Elliot, the missionary who died back in the late 1950’s reaching the Auca Indians of Ecuador, said this, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

The high cost of discipleship is also worth it because everything else is worthless in comparison. Verse 36, “what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” If you could have everything in the world you want, whether that’s wealth, fame, pleasure, sexual gratification, personal peace, a nice house, a loving spouse, several vacation homes, a comfortable retirement, Jesus says, if you gain everything you want in this life but you lose your

soul for eternity, it is a fool's bargain. Whatever it costs to follow Jesus is, in fact, a brilliant investment. The high cost of discipleship is worth it, thirdly, because your soul has supreme value. Verse 37, "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" What in the world would you gain? What would you have that is worth more than your soul?

Fourthly, the high cost of discipleship is worth it because Jesus will one day be your judge. Verse 38, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and 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' point is that He, the one who makes these extraordinary demands of us, is the very one who will someday be your judge. And He will respond to you in that day the way you have responded to His demands today. Do you really think that these conditions will seem unreasonable then?

There are three groups represented here this morning. If you're already a true follower of Jesus Christ, you need to remind yourself that this is how your Christian life began and nothing has changed since then. This is still what Jesus demands of you today. Not because of a prophecy of His death and resurrection, but because of our celebration of its reality this weekend. This is still what He demands.

If you don't claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, if you're here this morning with a spouse, or with your family, you just happen to be here because it's a cultural thing to do, but you wouldn't profess to know Christ, listen, Jesus who called you today, as He does in Luke 14, to count the cost, count the cost. You need to compare what it will cost you to follow Him with what you will lose if you don't: your soul forever.

And if you're here and you claim to be a Christian, you need to examine the reality of your faith in light of the conditions that Jesus lays down here. This is true repentance. This is true faith. Tragically, many in Jesus' day claimed, and many today still claim, to believe in Him but they've only believed in a superficial, non-saving way. Millions who call themselves Christians and who gather in churches like ours today are just cultural Christians. They live how they want to live. They don't read and obey Christ's word. They don't love His church.

Let me ask you, can you genuinely say in your heart that you have denied yourself, that you take up your cross daily, and that you follow Jesus Christ? If not, you are not a true, genuine Christian. Don't think that you can rely on some past profession or some prayer you prayed or some experience you had or some date written in the front of your Bible. Don't imagine that you can give Jesus a few Sundays a year and He's happy with that. If you want the salvation He purchased on this weekend 2,000 years ago, Jesus says, here are the conditions: you must deny yourself, you must take up your cross, and you must follow Him. In other words, it will cost you everything. Let's pray together.

Our Father, seal the words of our Lord to our hearts. Lord, I pray for those of us who are in Christ, help us to remind ourselves that this is still our responsibility. And we do so freely and willingly and gladly.

Lord, I pray for those here who are not believers. Maybe those who know they aren't, may they count the cost and realize what they're really gambling with, their soul forever, and may this be the day You draw them to Yourself.

And Father, I pray for those who are just cultural Christians, who claim Christianity, but who live how they want, who don't love Christ's word, who don't love His church. Lord, help them to see that they cannot, they are not His disciple. Father, I pray that You would draw them to Yourself even today through this word of our Lord. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.