

This evening we are going to continue studying Mark. Whenever Steve is here, he will be taking you through Colossians, and whenever I am here, I will be looking at some passages in Mark. So, if you’ve got a Bible, turn to chapter 8 and we are going to look at some good news for our souls this evening. And in Mark 8 we are both literally and figuratively in the middle of the gospel of Mark. We have come to the halfway point, okay? Basically, for the first seven chapters of Mark, the question that’s sort of implicitly being asked is, “Who is Jesus?” Who is this man who raises people from the dead? Who is this man who feeds 5,000 people with a few loaves and a few fish? Who is this man who can stop the waves of a storm with one word? And the fascinating thing about this question of who Jesus is, is the people who should get it, don’t get it. The religious leaders don’t get it. The disciples don’t get it. They’re all confused. But the people who get it, the people who seem to have the most faith are the outcasts, the broken, the bruised, the hurting. Even the demons seem to get it more than the disciples do. Well tonight in the passage we’re going to look at in Mark 8, we’re going to see for the first time that a human actually professes that Jesus is the Christ. The disciples actually begin to see a little more clearly just who Jesus is. And the focus in this passage and then for the rest of the gospel shifts from who Jesus is to what He has done. And what I want us to see tonight is how who He is and what He has done is good news for our souls, and hopefully we can see that more clearly and can apply that to our lives this evening, alright? So, let me pray again quickly, and then we’ll get into the sermon.

Father in heaven, we thank You so much for the opportunity to read Your word. We pray that You would speak. I pray that You would speak to me and through me right now and that by Your word and Your spirit You would nourish our souls. We pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

In 2018, Chris Pratt, from Guardians of the Galaxy and Parks and Rec, any Parks and Rec fans out there? Yeah, we’ve got a few. He received the MTV Generation Award and so he came up to receive his award and in typical Chris Pratt form he gave nine rules for life from Chris Pratt and they were a mixture of humor and seriousness. But what I was struck with was the faith that Chris Pratt demonstrated in some of these nine rules. And I want to read some of them to you because they actually connect with what Jesus is going to say in the passage tonight.

So, these are his nine rules: rule number one, breathe, if you don’t, you’ll suffocate. Good rule. Rule number two, you have a soul; be careful with it. Number three, don’t be a turd; if you’re strong, be a protector and if you’re smart be a humble influencer. Strength and intelligence can be weapons. Do not yield them against the weak; that makes you a bully. Be bigger than that. Number four, when giving a dog medicine, but the medicine in a little piece of hamburger. They won’t even know it’s medicine. That may or may not work with kids as well. Number five, it doesn’t matter what it is, earn it: a good deed, reach out to someone in pain, be of service, it feels good and it’s good for your soul. Number six, God is real, God loves you, God wants what’s best for you. Believe that. Number seven, I can’t tell you all the details of this, but let me just start out by saying, this is what he says. ‘If you have to use the restroom at a party, but you’re embarrassed that it’s going to stink up the bathroom, then just do what I do...’ If I told you actually what he said, I would probably get fired before I even started so if you want to find out what else he said come and find me afterward. All the guys would giggle like twelve-year-old schoolboys and all the women would get up and leave so I’m just going to stop right there. Number eight, learn to pray. It’s easy and it’s so, so good for your soul. And number nine, nobody is perfect. People are going to tell you you’re perfect just the way you are. You’re not.

You're imperfect. You always will be. But there's a powerful force that designed you that way, and if you're willing to accept that, you will have grace and grace is a gift.

Now, I think that Chris Pratt offers a lot of good advice in this passage, and one of the things that particularly strikes me is the way he tells us to be careful with our souls. And I know that one of the things that I see over and over again on the college campus and in my life and as I pastor students and people is that we continually sacrifice our souls for the things of this world, right? Our soul is the immaterial core of our being It's our personhood and our identity and over and over again I see us sacrificing our souls for pleasure, for success, for money, for affirmation, for love, for acceptance. I say this all the time about my students, they will sacrifice everything on the altar for their friends, even their souls. And when we do that, we destroy our souls and the temporary pleasures of this world leave us hurting and unsatisfied. And so, Chris Pratt says take care of your soul, and I think Jesus, in the passage we're about to read, says the same thing. Jesus says, what good is it if you gain the whole world but forfeit your soul? What good is it if we gain a promotion, but forfeit our souls? What good is it if we get a new car or a new house, but we forfeit our souls? What good is it if we're right, if we have the right theology and the right politics, but we forfeit our souls? It's not worth anything. It's not. Pratt's advice to take care of your soul becomes good news in the context of the gospel, and that's that Jesus has done everything necessary to care for our souls and He invites us to give it to Him. He invites us to give it to Him so that it can be satisfied. And then He calls us to do something radical, and that is to give it away, to give our lives away for the good of others.

So, we're going to look at two things tonight. We're going to look at the suffering Savior from Mark 8, and then how the suffering Savior turns us into suffering disciples, and somehow through that process of receiving the suffering Savior, and giving ourselves to others, that's how we care for our souls. So, let's look at Mark 8 here, we're going to start reading in verse 27.

“²⁷ And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” ³⁰ And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.”

So, for the first time in this gospel, a human has correctly professed who Jesus is. Peter gets the answer right. Jesus was and is the Christ. Christ means Messiah or anointed one. In the Old Testament, the anointed ones were the prophets, the priests, and the kings. But after the Jews were exiled into Babylon and they were brought back, the anointed one began more and more to refer to a king. A Messianic Savior who would come back and rescue the Jews from their captivity, okay? And over and over again in sort of the inter-testamental period between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament, what happened is false Messiahs would rise up and they would promise to give military and political freedom and they would fail, and they would rise up, and they would fail. That's the kind of king that Peter and the Jews were looking for. They were looking for a military and a political Savior.

So that's what Peter had in mind when he said that Jesus is the Messiah. He had the right answer, but he had the wrong understanding. As we see here, Jesus is going to correct that in verses 31-33. So let's look at Mark 8:31-33.

“³¹ 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. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.””

So, Jesus begins to correct this false understanding by teaching what he must do. Who is He? He is the Messiah, but what has He come to do? He has come to suffer, to be rejected, to be killed and to rise again. And what Jesus is doing right here is He is taking two concepts that have never been put together in Jewish history, okay? So, the Jews had a concept of this Son of Man, this divine, Messianic king that would come back and rescue God’s people. But they also had these prophecies of a suffering Savior from Isaiah that would come and sacrifice Himself. But never before, until here, had those two concepts been brought together. And what Jesus is saying here is, ‘Yes, I’m the divine Messianic king, but I’m also the suffering servant. I’m the King, but I’m the King on a cross. I’m the King that’s come to suffer and die.’

Now I mean, I guess to give you a little bit of an explanation of how radical this would’ve been, let’s use an example that maybe some of us could associate with. There was a football game yesterday of the Red River variety between Texas and Oklahoma, right? Now, imagine that Lincoln Riley came out before the game and said, “I am the savior. I am finally going to defeat the evil longhorns and this is how we’re going to do it. We’re going to forfeit the game. We’re just going to lose it.” What would Mike Dunham and all the other OU fans have done? They would have thrown a fit! They would go crazy. They would be shocked. That’s not how you win the game. You don’t win the game through losing. But that’s exactly what Jesus says He’s going to do right here.

Maybe let’s take another example. We’re in an election year, and regardless of what party you’re affiliated with or you know, maybe you’re left or right or maybe you’re in the middle or maybe you don’t know what you are. But imagine you’ve got your candidate, and your candidate says he’s going to come and he’s going to save everything in America and he’s going to make America the utopia that we think it should be, and he says, “This is how I’m going to do it. I’m going to get elected and I’m going to sacrifice myself on inauguration day. I’m going to totally give myself up.” That’s what Jesus is saying right here, and that’s why Peter was so shocked that when it says he rebuked Jesus, he was using a word, the same word that it uses when they rebuked the demons in the passages before this. Because it was utterly shocking that the King would say He is going to come and die, but that’s exactly what Jesus says, because that’s exactly what it took. Jesus says, ‘I am the King the King that you’ve been waiting for, and I’m the King you need, but I’m not the King you expect. Victory is going to come through defeat. Life is going to come through death. Freedom is going to come through submission.’ And we know, that eventually Jesus suffered, and He won through suffering, not with a sword. And he didn’t go to a throne, but He went to a cross. And He wore a crown, but it wasn’t a crown of gold, it was a crown of thorns. He had to suffer. Why?

There are three reasons why He had to suffer and I’m borrowing these from Tim Keller’s book on the gospel of Mark, I would highly recommend it, it’s called *King’s Cross*. But he says there are three reasons that Jesus had to suffer and die, and the first one is this, He had to suffer

and die that we might experience true love. There's that personal necessity, it was personal necessary. He had to die that we might experience true love. Implicitly we understand the difference between true love and fake love, right? So fake love uses the other person to give us happiness. Fake love is conditional and it's not vulnerable. It just uses the other person. Opposite to that, true love gives to the other person. It wants good for the other person. True love is vulnerable. It's unconditional. So, this is what we want, we all want true love. We want love that's vulnerable, unconditional, and self-giving. But here's the problem, we need true love, but none of us can totally give it. We can't give ourselves fully and completely to somebody else, why? Because we also need true love like we need water and oxygen. If we don't get true love, we will die. We need someone who is love in and of himself to love us. That's Jesus. That's why the Trinity is the foundation of Christian theology, that it is one God in three persons. And because it's one God in three persons, those three persons can love each other totally, completely and fully. You see, there's a heresy out there that says God created us because He needed something. He needed something to love. That is not true. If God created us because He needed something to love, He would use us, and He wouldn't be God. But God is love and He has love in and of Himself, and because He has love in and of Himself, Jesus was able to totally, fully and completely give Himself for us in love. So, we receive Jesus' love and that allows us to love other people well. When we receive Jesus' love, it allows us to love our kids well, it allows us to love our spouse well, it allows us to love our friends well and our neighbors well. It was personally necessary for Jesus to die so we could experience true love.

Secondly, Jesus had to die because it was legally necessary. So, any time someone is wronged, a debt is accrued. Anytime someone is wronged a debt is accrued. If I'm backing out of the parking lot tonight and I back into somebody's car, which could happen, and has happened before in my life, right? Now, when I back into that person's car, I owe them a debt, right? That car is damaged. Somebody has to pay that debt. Either I have to pay that debt, or my insurance does that I pay to pay the debt. Either I have to pay it, or the person who drives the car has to pay for that car to be fixed, or they could just absorb the damage to their car. Either way, somebody's got to pay the debt. It's the same way with your reputation. If you say a slanderous word about somebody or a gossiping word about somebody, then you have accrued a debt against them. And either you have to pay that debt, or they have to absorb the loss of their reputation. Somebody's got to pay for it. Now that's true for us, how much more is that true for the just and holy God of the universe? Every time we sin against Him and go our own way, we accrue a debt. Every lie, every theft, every sexual immoral act, every gossip, every slander, every hateful thought, all of those, when we go our own way, that accrues a debt against God that must be paid, and either we pay it, or He's got to pay it. And Jesus had to die to pay the debt that we owed God, for all of our sins. Every sin is paid for one of two places, it's either paid for on the cross or it's paid for in hell. And what Jesus is saying here is that He had to die to pay our debt so that all who would come to him in faith and ask for forgiveness, truly can be forgiven. And so, I would say, what is the debt that is lingering in your soul? What is the thing that you feel guilty about and you feel ashamed about? Jesus' sacrifice paid for it. The debt has already been paid. He's already absorbed the cost of that, so that everyone who would come to Him and ask forgiveness for that can truly and really be forgiven by God.

It's legally necessary, it's personally necessary, and lastly, it's cosmically necessary. Hebrews 9:22 says that only blood can pay the debt of sin. You have to have a life for a life.

Only blood can bring justice. Now, what's interesting about this passage is, who were the people that who were going to kill Jesus? It wasn't this angry mob of immoral Gentiles, it was the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees who were cruelly calculating exactly how they were going to crucify Jesus. They did it legally! They killed the only innocent man who ever lived. It was an unjust murder. This shows the corruption and the injustice of the world's systems that we have, right? But, Jesus broke Satan, sin and death. He broke their hold on this world through His death, right? He established a kingdom in which justice and righteousness will reign. He became the just and righteous King and in His kingdom justice and righteousness reign and every wrong will be made right. And I know in our country, in our culture, even in our church right now, we are crying out for justice. We want to live in a world where wrongs are made right. And I will tell you, I do not have a legal experience to tell you exactly how our justice system can be made right. I just don't know. It's well above my paygrade. But I can tell you that there is one who will make all things right and that is Jesus. Through His life, death and resurrection, He has broken the cosmic stranglehold that injustice had on this world and someday He is going to put things right. Those are the things that our souls need. Our soul deeply needs this personal, legal and cosmic salvation that Jesus has brought. And when we bring our souls to Jesus and we give it to Him, He meets the deepest need of our heart. That's how we care for our souls. We talk a lot about self-care in our culture, Jesus talks a lot about soul care.

And then, after that He says something crazy, and it's that we save our souls by giving them to Him, and then what He asks us to do is then to give our lives away. We don't just hold on to this life, we give it away. Let's look at the rest of the passage. Look at Mark 8, starting in verse 34.

“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. 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.””

So, there is a content to our faith as Christians, and that content is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's what we just talked about. The suffering Savior that we have. But over and over again in the book of Mark, what we see is that faith in Christ demands action, that it is something that is actionable in your life, that is demonstrated by the way that you live and the way that you act, and this passage is a great example of that. Jesus is clearly saying here that to have faith in Him, to follow Him, means that we have to do three things: that we have to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him.

And this is the exact opposite of everything the world would tell us if we want to care for ourselves, right? What would the world tell us to do? The world would tell us that we need to indulge ourselves, that we need to avoid suffering, and that we need to follow the ways of this world. And what Jesus is saying is that these two options lead you down drastically different paths. If we indulge ourselves, if we avoid suffering, and if we follow the ways of this world, then that leads away from Jesus. But if we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow

Jesus, then that leads to Him, that leads to eternal life with Him, that leads to seeing the glory and the power of the kingdom come in our lives here and when we go to heaven. Jesus is saying, if we cling to our life, if we try to take the things of this world, the physical, material things of this world that we try to hold on to, if we try to save it, if we try to save ourselves, then we're going to lose it. Eventually, we're going to lose this world. It's going to happen. And if we cling to it, we're also going to lose our souls. But what Jesus is saying is if we give Him our soul now, then we're going to have Him and joy eternal in this life, and we're going to have eternal life with Him in heaven. We're going to have both things together. Jesus does this incredible thing where He offers us the very thing our souls need, but it also requires us to give Him everything.

There's this great example of this in one of C.S. Lewis' books. It's in one of the Chronicles of Narnia books, I can't remember exactly which one, but there's a little girl named Jill and she is waiting by a stream, and as she is waiting by a stream she gets thirsty and she realizes that Aslan, the lion figure that is the God figure in the story, comes up and they have a conversation, and this is what they say. The lion says, "Are you not thirsty?" And Jill says, "I am dying of thirst." And then Aslan says, "Then drink." And she says, "May I? Could I? Would you mind going away while I do?" And the lion answers this by a look and a very low growl and as Jill gazed at his emotionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. She says, "Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come?" And Aslan says, "I make no promise." And Jill, she's so thirsty, without noticing it she wants to come closer and she says, "Do you eat girls?" And Aslan says, "I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms." And it says, he didn't say this as if he were boasting, nor as if he were sorry, nor as if he were angry. And she says, "I dare not come and drink." And then Aslan says, "Then you will die of thirst." And then Jill says, "Oh dear!" She comes another step closer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." And Aslan says, "There is no other stream." And what C.S. Lewis is describing here is this great tension between what Jesus offers us, he offers us the very thing our souls most long for and most need, the living water of the gospel, it's been provided in Jesus Christ. It's everything that we need, but it also demands everything from us. It demands that we give Jesus our lives, that we give Him our all, that that is what is best for our soul. What's best for our soul is that we give it to Jesus, and then we give our lives away in sacrifice and service to other people.

And so, this evening, I want to close by just saying a few words to the different types of people here. If you're here tonight and you're thinking about becoming a Christian, you know that you're not a Christian, you're considering professing faith in Christ, I would tell you that Jesus is your suffering Savior and that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you'll be saved. That's the thing which you most want and need. And then take up your cross and follow Him daily.

If you're already a Christian, like many of us are here, then I think this passage asks us to ask, 'Is there anything in my life that I'm trying to withhold from Jesus?' Is there any area of your life which you've said, 'Jesus, you can have this area of my life, but not this area of my life'? Jesus won't allow you to do that. The cross demands that we give our all. Jesus gave His life and His all. And we find life in Him when we give everything to Him: our money, our time, our work, our sexuality, it's all His. What areas of our life are we keeping from Jesus? He asks us to give it to Him.

If you're here tonight and you're a struggling Christian, this pattern of taking up your cross daily and following Jesus, that is your path back to sanity. That's the process. I deal with

students who are stuck in sin over and over again and I speak to men and women who are stuck in sin over and over again and they come to me and they say, what do I do? We go back to the cross. We go back to Jesus. We repeat the same steps over and over again. By faith in Christ, we come to Him, our living water, we take a deep breath, we deny ourselves, we take up our cross and we follow Him. And over time that changes us. If you're familiar with Celebrate Recovery Alcohol's Anonymous, you know that you begin with the twelve steps and then you keep repeating the twelve steps over and over again and that the healing process continues to take place in your life. And it's as we continue to give ourselves to Jesus and pour ourselves out to others that we begin to care for our souls and we actually gain life. We gain life by losing it.

Nobody embodied this more than the great missionary Jim Elliot. I just want to close by reminding you of something that he said. He was the embodiment of the way that Jesus is talking about here. On October 28, 1949, Jim Elliot wrote this in his journal: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose." He said, you're not a fool if you give up your physical life because you cannot keep it, to gain what you cannot lose which is your soul in heaven. And then on January 15, 1957, Elliot and four other missionaries were speared to death because they were trying to share the gospel with an unreached people group. And what's amazing is we don't have to go to an unreached people group to give up our souls for Jesus. We get to do it every day in our homes, in our offices, with our neighbors. We can take up our cross and follow Jesus and give ourselves to Him and to others every day wherever we are, and Jesus says, that's how we care for our souls, and that's how we meet our needs. We can't do it except by the Spirit, so let's pray that God would give us the power to go out and live out this teaching. Please pray with me.

Father in heaven, we thank You so much that You have met all of our needs in Christ and you have given us everything that we need to go out and to sacrifice ourselves for others and somehow through this receiving Jesus and giving ourselves away that's how we can care for our souls. We thank You so much for doing what we could not do. We thank you for the life, death and resurrection of the Son. We thank You for the good news of the gospel. We can't live out this teaching, we can't experience it without the power of the Holy Spirit and so we pray that the Spirit would work in us and through us to bring glory to You. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.