

The Two Crosses of Christianity

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Go to Mark chapter 8 this morning. We'll look at verses 27 through 38. Mark 8:27-38.

27 Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." 29 And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." 30 And He warned them to tell no one about Him. 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 was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 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. 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. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? 37 For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 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."

I have had numerous people through the years and many of you have too, ask me or maybe with cynicism speak to us about, "Why are there 2 crosses in your logo? We know in the Bible there are 3 crosses. Jesus was crucified and there was a thief crucified on his left and a thief crucified on his right." I say, "No, there are only 2 crosses in Christianity. There have only been 2 and always been 2. By the way, one of those thieves died and went to hell. What do we want to remember his cross for? But one of the thieves on the cross believed and was gloriously converted right there before his death." There has always been and always will be only 2 crosses in Christianity: there's the Savior's cross and the saint's cross. That's all there is.

First of all, let's talk about the Savior's cross. Mark writing this says that they're in the area of Caesarea Philippi, this is at the base of Mount Hermon, an area ruled by Herod Philip. There is a marble temple there dedicated to Augustus Caesar. It was a place dedicated to the glory of Rome. You can go there today and you'll see most of Rome's glory has faded and not departed but the glory of Jesus Christ remains on forever. They are on a mountain slope here, a somewhat secluded place, ideal to avoid the harassment the people might give him and he might give his disciples some special teaching time and he dives right in the text says very plainly, talking about his coming death on a cross. His crucifixion is now about 6 months away.

We understand that the crowds in general and to a good extent even his disciples did not have yet ears to hear. Like so many today, probably some of them thought of him as a great teacher or a good example, someone who lived unselfishly and is trying to teach mankind how to love one another unselfishly. Just a good example but they wouldn't hold him to be God incarnate. Lord of lords. Savior of the world. Some have even surmised that this Christ was mentally ill and that's why he went around saying that he's God in human flesh and Lord and King of all. He was just deranged. You can go to most any mental facility today and find folks that will tell you they're the Lord. Some would say, "Well, he meant well. He was sincere but he became so popular that the people began to force upon him, 'Oh, you must be the Messiah promised for us,' and he just kind of succumbed to the pressure." These disciples, as will see very clearly, they still had the Old Testament prophetic understanding that he was coming only to be a military and political Messiah to remove them from slavery and give them dominion and conquer all their enemies. That's true but not yet. But one thing is for certain: if you want to understand the truth, you've got to stop listening to worldly speculation and read the biblical revelation. Entertaining all the speculations of all the learned of the day will not enlighten you at all if. If you do that ignoring biblical revelation, it's only going to lead to reprobation. If you want to know if speculation has any authentication, you've got to look at the biblical revelation because revelation always is the clarification for speculation. C. S. Lewis said it years ago and it's been used a million times but it's still true: if you take what Jesus said about himself, you only have 3 conclusions you can possibly come to. He's a liar. He just went around lying, claiming to be the Savior of the world and God Incarnate. Or he's a deranged maniac on the level of a poached egg. Just out of his mind. Or he's the Lord he said he was. He's God in human form as he said he was.

So Jesus asked these guys, "Who are all these people saying that I am?" They said, "They're saying some pretty impressive things. They think you're like Elijah, one of the Old Testament prophets." Jesus, not caring about the modern public opinion of the day and, by the way, someone said: public opinion is the judgment of the incapable many as opposed to that of the discerning few. So Jesus says, "Now, what about you? My inner circle? My 12 disciples? Who do you say that I am?" There's a strong emphasis in the Greek there, "I want to know who do you say that I am?" You may realize, pastors, when you're pastoring your church, if you've got a few men who really get it, you can go anywhere. Jesus knew the crowds were all over the place about who he was but he said, "I want to know who you guys think I am."

Peter, the spokesman for the 12 comes shining through, "Thou art the Christ," he says. He hit the nail on the head. I think we learn something that against all that was maybe being said about Jesus and all that people thought about Jesus, a great prophet, a great miracle worker, a great healer, whatever it was, when Peter said, "Thou art the Christ," he had a minority viewpoint even though he didn't fully understand what that meant. He still was in the minority but he was right. A true believer is willing whenever necessary to fly in the face of public opinion and openly express a conviction that is contrary to the masses and how you and I in the town square and in the office and in the schoolhouse are being called upon today with humility but with conviction state what's right in a world that's gone wrong. Peter is a good example of that.

When Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am," and Peter speaking for the 12 says, "Thou art the Christ," the word "Christ" means "the anointed one." The Old Testament phrase or title would be "the Messiah." They may not have known all of that but we know from the Old Testament prophecies the Messiah was the word for God's one true and final prophet. Not only did Jesus come as a prophet to preach the truth, Jesus was the truth. Also, that he was the one true anointed priest of God. He wasn't just a priest, he was the one priest who is the true mediator between God and man. He didn't come to be just a king, he was the one true anointed King who came to be not only just a king but King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now, after Peter said, "Thou art this Christ. You're the Christ," Jesus immediately and emphatically says, "Don't tell anybody that." Why would he say that? He would say that because the great throngs and masses of people were wanting to forcefully make him this political military Messiah and give them victory over Roman slavery and conquer their enemies across the earth. Again, Jesus is coming back to do that one day but that's not his mission now. So he saw things were out of hand and he said, "Keep that quiet. I'm not going to succumb to man's wishes for me. My Father sent me on a mission to a cross. The throne is later. The cross is now."

Before he had been speaking in parables and in veiled ways to the disciples but the text here tells us he began to speak very openly and very plainly that he's going to be delivered up, he's going to be crucified and then he's going to rise again. Now, this was very shocking information to these disciples. They too had believed and hoped for a military political overthrow of Rome and they thought the Messiah was Christ and he was going to bring that but now he's saying right the opposite. Not only is he not going to conquer their enemies, he's going to go and be conquered by the enemies. But think of their faith. They may not have had a lot of understanding like I exhorted us earlier in the conference. We've got to take brothers where they are. If they're humble and growing and learning sound doctrine, we'll work with them, amen? That's where these guys are. They're on the way but because it means something that they have forsaken everything they know and everything they had to follow Christ. They didn't have all the understanding but the Spirit of God working in their hearts gave them a conviction that, "He is right and I must follow him."

Well, Peter, verse 32, "And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him." One minute he's Peter the rock, "Thou art the Christ." This next minute, he's Peter the stumbling block. Peter is thinking rationally. Peter is thinking logically. He's saying, "We've left everything to follow him. We love him." The only role Peter and these guys have at this point in their lives is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. They want him to be a conqueror. They want him to be victorious. He simply can't die. So Peter in his fallen, fleshly, manly reasoning, begins to rebuke Jesus of this pessimistic and fatalistic attitude he has. "This can't happen. Jesus look, we can really change the world, Jesus, if you'll just submit to our way to do it." Amen, pastor. Aren't you being pressured on all sides and from your own flesh to bend the corners on God's means and use man's means and methods to "make it happen," to get it of accomplished? G. Campbell Morgan said, "The man who loves Jesus but shuns God's methods is a stumbling block." Still, that's the problem you guys are facing in the church today. It's the problem we face in the church today. But I've got a good situation here. After 34 years, we've disciplined each other enough to where if I went to gimmicks to grow this church, I'd get fired. That's good to have elders like that, amen? That's good to have elders like that. Now, don't clap about my firing. Let's clap about something else. No, I know what you're saying and I appreciate that.

So at this point, Jesus' statement that, "I'm going to be conquered, I'm going to be killed. I'm going to die," that seemed illogical to these guys. That seemed irrational but all in the end it's going to make wonderful sense. So what does Jesus do? Verse 33: he counter rebukes. Boy, he didn't miss a beat. He didn't pull a punch here. He immediately sees how this erroneous, false reasoning is going to hamper true doctrine and the truth about who he is and so he turns and he rebukes Peter back. Peter is rebuking him, "No, you can't go die." Jesus turns around and he says, "Get behind Me, Satan." Wow, that's strong. That is so strong. Peter is publicly embarrassed and publicly ashamed. What is he saying? He said, "Peter, right now you're thinking like a mere man would think. You're thinking the way fallen human intellect would figure this out how it's supposed to work. Peter, you're supposed to have faith in the truth of what my Father is doing. Peter, you have not risen above the level of ordinary men and in their thinking and you deserve the name of the one whose role you're now playing. Satan is the one who is always behind a crossless Christianity. Your conclusions, Peter, are based on the conclusions that come out of the natural, fallen heart." In Jeremiah 17:9 it says, "Man's heart is desperately wicked and deceitful beyond all things."

Church, remind yourself that Satan really doesn't mind if we teach Jesus as a great healer and a great teacher and a great miracle worker as long as we keep him off the cross. The cross, you see, will free men's souls from Satan's dominion. Satan came to Jesus in the wilderness, temptations, and Satan said, "Look Jesus, why all of this suffering and hardship? Why all of this honoring the Father's will? If you'll just do it my way, Christ, we can miss all that suffering and I'll give you the entire world as your kingdom." And for a limited time, Satan was god of the world. He had some authority there. But we know the story, Jesus quoted Scripture to Satan and said, "Be gone. I'm here to go to the cross. That's what my Father sent me to do."

Jesus stayed committed. Christianity, you see, without a cross is worthless to save men. There is no Christianity without the cross just like there's not a waterfall without water; there's not wind without air; there is not a forest without trees; there's not lightning without electricity. Spurgeon said, "Oh, down, down, down with everything else but up, up, up with the cross of Christ. Down with your baptism. Down with your Masses. Down with your sacraments. Down with your priestcraft. Down with your rituals and your liturgies. Down with your fine music and down with your pomp and your robes and your garments and all of your ceremonies. But up, up, up with the naked cross of Christ and an expiring Savior." It is the preaching of Christ crucified that saves men's souls. That's the foundation stone. That's the centerpiece cross in our logo. That's the main cross. The other cross hangs on it. The second cross is dependent upon the Savior's cross.

But Jesus goes now and he says, "I have told you about my death and my cross and that's the centerpiece of my Father's work for me. That's the foundation stone everything else rests on. Now," he said, "let's talk about the saint's cross." The saint's cross. Notice first of all in verse 34, the absoluteness of it. All saints carry a cross. Verse 34 says, "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.'" Now, as if one heavy-duty lesson were not enough, this is the second heavy duty lesson he's giving the disciples on this day. But more than the disciples, verse 34 says he summons the crowd. It's as if he's saying, "Look, everybody needs to know this. Let's just get all this settled right now," because there were throngs of people still hanging around Jesus for the next miracle, for the next free meal, for the next wonder or sign he might perform. And he said, "You guys, that's okay to love me for that power but you're missing the crux of the issue. You're mixing the heart of what this is about so I want all of the crowd to hear this." But that does tell us something else and that is that anyone and everyone can be a disciple. It's not just for a select class. It's not just for a certain few. Now, the Bible does say Jesus came to preach the Gospel to the poor but that statement is a summary of the fact that more poor loved him and devoted themselves to him than the rich would. The rich usually are preoccupied with their own kingdom and what they're doing and they have a harder time coming to Christ. Not that they can't come, but more poor seem to come than the wealthy. But anyone can come to Christ: rich or poor; educated or uneducated; talented or untalented; those from good families on the right side of the track and those from bad families on the wrong side of the track. We had a church member, I don't remember your name but one of our staff told me about your testimony and that church member said that the earliest memory they have of childhood is sitting on the floor in their den with their parents passed out, stoned out of their minds on drugs and alcohol. That's where they came from but they can be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Anyone can. He called the whole crowd. Jesus is not looking for ability, he's looking for availability. He's not looking for superstars, he's looking for "whosoever will."

He says 3 things about this cross or surrounding this principle of us carrying our cross. First of all he says: you must be willing to deny yourself. Deny yourself. It means to say no to self. Now look, this is not self-denial. Self-denial is when you in the strength of your fallen man decide to give up something for another cause. That's what the Roman Church teaches this time of year during the lent season. Give up some pleasure so that

you can show God you love him and it might help you be saved. Radical, blasphemous, unbiblical teaching. The real truth is in Christianity, "I deny myself to find my pleasure, not to miss my pleasure. I deny myself to find the glories and joys of God which are greatly better than the base pleasures of this fallen world." Isn't it grieving to you when our entire culture is given over to the fallen, animalistic pleasures and there's no emphasis on the higher pleasures of God?

So we deny ourselves to get rid of our problem, to overcome what's truly holding us back. It's not us self-denying in our own strength, it's people who have had a work of the regeneration of the Spirit of God in their hearts and they've drawn a line in the sand and the new purpose and pattern of their life because of a changed heart they now desire to, as a pattern, with a genuine purpose, though not perfect, say no to self and yes to Christ. It's not a brutal, brow-beating coercion, it's a new birth with a new heart and a new desire and a new conviction about things. I'm not here to beat you into some sort of legalistic submission. I'm here to preach to you the glories of Christ to where your heart is changed and you want to get in on the journey of learning the great pleasures of God and saying no to self because all self is going to do is ruin you and drag you straight to hell.

Philippians 3:7, "But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Now, when Paul said that, he didn't say, "I go out looking for everything I can give up for Jesus Christ." What he means is: in God's will, if I have to give up something that I might have wanted, I will give that up. Let me go ahead and say this: there have been some really unbalanced and I think ultimately dangerous teaching here about cross bearing and some of it has come under the title of being radical for Jesus. You don't need to be radical for Jesus, you need to serve Jesus. Your service for Jesus and your bearing the cross is most likely that you get up in the morning and you cook breakfast for your children and you love your husbands and you submit to them and you try to be a witness at the grocery store and you go back home and you cook supper and you go to bed praising God and loving him. And if during the day you run into somebody at the grocery store or you bump into somebody that thinks you're crazy, you just love them back and carry your cross and go on and cook breakfast the next morning. The ordinary for God. All of this nonsense that everybody has got to do some weird, strange thing. That's what you find in cultic teachings like in India. There's a guy in India that won't even walk. He just rolls everywhere he goes and people think, "Oh, he is devoted. Oh, his devotion." He's a crazed idiot. He's going to roll straight into hell. You don't get to heaven because you deny yourself. You get to heaven because Christ saves you and then he changes you and he gives you a joy and purposing to find pleasures in him, not in self and in the world. If he gives you great wealth, honor God with your wealth but don't feel ashamed about it. You be what God has called you to be and if honoring Christ where he has called you to be causes you persecution, causes you ridicule, causes you difficulty, you take that cross and you keep on for Jesus. Now, some are to go to the jungles of the Papua, New Guinea, some are to go to Africa, some are to go around the world, some are to do some things that may be physically hardships but God will let you know if you're that kind of person. You just be real for Jesus in this world from your heart for his glory.

Deny yourself, he says secondly: take up your cross. It's the aorist tense. It means once for all. It means, "I voluntarily accept if and when there is pain, suffering, shame, persecution that's going to come my way because I'm now learning to honor Christ, so be it." You may, you may businessman, you may go out of business in today's world. We do not live in a post-Christian culture. We went through that real quickly. We now live in an anti-Christian culture. I really believe it's kind of like I don't want to be mystical here but in my spirit I increasingly believe we will see faithful pastors really suffer for the Gospel in the coming generations. I'm talking about prison time. I'm talking about difficulties. Now look, don't go out there trying to get in prison. We don't need any of that proud radicalism. You just be real for Jesus. It will come and get you. They'll come and get you, don't worry about it. We don't need the false...that's what I'm saying, don't put a false veneer of devotion on this. Just be a real Christian where God has called you to be, willing to carry that cross when called for.

You know, as we follow Christ, we have joyful unity with heaven but often we are on a radical collision course with this world. We should not be surprised if we have enemies. We should not be surprised when some of our friends turn against us. Have you learned to let Jesus pick your friends? You just live for Jesus and you'll find out who your friends are supposed to be. The ones that aren't will fall off. That's not abnormal. That's typical. Don't be surprised if some family members are estranged from you and think you've gone a little bit too far. Humble yourself. Love them. Reach out to them. Serve them but don't be surprised if they think you're somebody they can't fellowship with. And of course, your flesh, you're still in your unredeemed human package until you get your new glorified body package in heaven. Your flesh is going to work against you too but in each case, it is our purpose by the changed heart and the empowerment of the Spirit to put the cross on our shoulder and say, "That's fine. I don't carry it as a drudgery." What the convict does out of duress, we do out of heart devotion. The convicts in this day were required to carry the cross down the Via Dolorosa and go to a place called Calvary and be executed for their crime. They did it by force. We do it because God has changed our hearts and now we desire to follow the Jesus of Nazareth.

Follow me, he says. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Thirdly: follow me. It means to follow and continue to follow. When they carried their cross, the criminals that is in Jerusalem under the Roman edict that was against them of justice, they were publicly declaring as they carried that cross through town, "Roman law is right and I am wrong." When we go into the world and we're in the office and we humbly say, "I'm not here to be unkind or mean-spirited to anyone but marriage is a creation of God and it's between a man and a woman. I'll be kind to all people but I will never change that conviction." And then you're ridiculed, you're laughed at, some radical tries to work to get your job. What you're doing is you're saying, "Convicts are forced to carry that kind of cross, I'll just carry it voluntarily." Don't go looking for it, just be real and be genuine as you live for Jesus.

Well, the absoluteness of it. He calls the whole crowd and he says, "If anyone is going to be my disciple, that's what it's like." Don't try to be this disciple until you've had the new birth. You can't do it. You've got to have a new heart to do this and you can't birth a new

heart, the Spirit of God does that. "Well, how do I get one?" All I can tell you is that you need to fall on your face and beg God to give you one. Tell him you believe in Jesus and you want to be forgiven and the Bible says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I promise you, you bow your knee before God with a broken and humble heart as a repentant sinner and ask Christ to come in and save you, I'm telling you, Christ will save you. But of course, you can't do that if the Spirit doesn't help you. But that's beyond our control.

Well, the absoluteness of it, it's absolute but notice there are some advantages to it, verses 35 through 38. We're almost done. He says, "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." Now, he says, whoever saves his life, that means if you decide, "No, no, no. I don't want to lose any of the pleasures. I mean, my whole intent, my heart purpose of living is to squeeze every juice of pleasure this world gives me." He said, "If that's your modus operandi, if that's the way you function, then you're going to lose everything. If you want to grab for all the gusto and that's what drives you on this earth, you're going to lose everything. Everything will be gone. You shall lose it." First of all, you're going to be continually empty down here and then you get a goose egg for eternity. Nothing for eternity.

He said then "but if you lose your life," verse 35, "for My sake and the gospel's," that is, you have the heart predetermined purpose and intent, "I'm going to please my Lord whatever that means." We don't get into legalism here at Grace Life where this brother over here goes beyond Scripture and finds a bunch of rules for the rest of us to follow and this brother over here has a personal conviction that he requires everybody else to follow. We don't do that here. You'd better show me clear chapter and verse if you want me to do it. But if you do, I will humble myself and do it. Amen, church? So we don't get into sidelined secondary issues but on the things the Bible is clear, we do want to hold each other accountable and be willing to take whatever comes to do what the Scriptures require. That's losing my life. That means there might be some pleasures, some joys, some recreations, some so-called fulfillments. They are all lies. Satan is a great counterfeiter and liar. They're all really lies. They don't last. But he makes them look awful good. By the way, isn't it neat in the Providence of God that there is a real balance here because it is good and right for the saints of God to enjoy the common graces of this life.

I plan on, God may not allow it, I plan on eating a 16 ounce steak at 5 o'clock this evening for the glory of God. But should I walk in the restaurant and they say, "You're not welcome here," I'll go home and eat peanut butter and crackers for the glory of God. Do you see what I mean? If you get a church that loves Jesus, they'll pay you the kind of salary where you can buy steak because that's right in God's eyes for you to generously and joyously take care of your pastors. There is not a trace of Scripture to the contrary. Not a trace.

He says, "but if you lose your life, if you determine in your hearts because I have changed your hearts that when and if necessary any of the pleasures of earth get in the way of honoring Me, those are gone. You put those aside." He said, "If that happens, then

you're going to gain greatly." Notice what he says, 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." Verse 36, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" You know, Satan's philosophy is: glory now without suffering but it ends up in eternal loss and eternal suffering. God's philosophy is: possibly some suffering now but transformed into eternal glory later. Romans 8:18, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Verse 37, "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" What will it be worth to gain every ounce of this temporal, lying, counterfeit pleasure the world throws at you and then go to hell for eternity?

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." That means if you are one who has as a predetermined purpose and pattern of your life to say, "I will not honor Jesus Christ. I will not yield if I'm called upon. I will not sacrifice pleasures and things of this earth for him. If I can tag him onto my life and get a 'get out of hell free' ticket, that's fine but I'm not going to make him my Lord and I'm not going to purpose to follow him if it cost me anything." Now, that's modern Christianity. That's the modern Gospel we are hearing which is not a Gospel. He said, "If that's what you are, you lose everything forever." There is therefore a sense in which our future condition is based on our present attitude and conduct. In other words, there ought to be some fruit of this reality showing in our lives today if we're one the Lord's going to receive when he comes again.

The key question is: church, churches, pastors, are we going to waste our lives or invest our lives? To reject Christ and live for this world is a total waste. To surrender to Christ is to reap lasting dividends both now and for all eternity. By the way, just because we have a lot of pastors here and a lot of guys who haven't been down the road maybe quite as far as we have: there are trying and difficult and troubling seasons and there are seasons of persecution but God brings joy and favor right in the midst of that. He'll just insert little joys, insert little blessings, insert little glories right in the midst of that process. He's not going to leave you without hope. About the time you're about ready to quit, pastor, somebody is going to walk up and say, "Pastor, my heart has been changed." You're going to say, "Praise God. He is working. I'm going to hang on and preach another Sunday." Amen and amen.

Well, Brother Steve, why don't you come?