

Message #29

Mark 8:34-38

It has been over two years since Jesus surfaced and began His public ministry that included doing some incredible miracles to establish that He was the God/Savior/Messiah/King. Christ is about to head toward Jerusalem and He is being followed by hundreds, if not thousands of people.

We already know from **verse 28** that the vast majority of people don't have a clue as to who Jesus actually is. Some think He is John; some think He is Elijah and some think He is a prophet. But these people are all following Him because of what He can do.

Apparently many people were considering joining the band of disciples. Jesus was viewed as kind of a Robin Hood with his merry men and many in the crowd were thinking of joining the movement. Keep in mind that most do not believe He is their Savior and most do not believe He is God; but they were willing to follow Him. They thought He could go to Jerusalem and take it over and possibly overthrow Rome. They wanted to follow Him.

So in **verse 34**, Jesus calls "the crowd" along with His disciples. This is a specific crowd who had been following Him physically while He was here on earth. Although there are great applications we can make from this for the Church Age, the fact is we are not part of this crowd. Now what He says to this crowd is this:

IF YOU WANT TO PHYSICALLY FOLLOW ME, YOU WILL HAVE TO BELIEVE IN ME AND MAKE PERSONAL SACRIFICES FOR ME AND DEFEND ME AND MY WORD TO THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION.

Now the adulterous and sinful generation to whom He is referring is primarily national Israel. So they would have to be willing to take a stand against the religious system and leaders. This would be very intimidating and very threatening.

Now keep in mind who they are committing themselves to follow here. This is God. This is not following you or me. In fact, I don't want you following me because I am so pathetic. But the one they are contemplating following is the God/Savior/Messiah/King. He is on earth and in Palestine and He is literally walking before them.

So if you were going to become one of His followers, it would require a considerable sacrifice. For one thing, He is about to leave the area where you live and head to Jerusalem. Being a true follower of Jesus Christ is not some part-time take it or leave it volunteer work. It is a full-time commitment.

Now the main thought is this: "If anyone wishes to follow Jesus Christ," here is what he must be willing to do.

The “if clause” is first class conditional. So the meaning is this: “since many people seem to want to follow Jesus Christ” while He is actually here on earth, here is what they need to be willing to do. This is reality. He is actually here and this is the kind of commitment one would have to make to actually travel with the God/Savior/Messiah/King.

Now before we tackle this, we know you did not have to follow Him to be saved. We may recall that a man who had been demon-possessed had believed in Christ and wanted to follow Him and Jesus said no, you go back home (Mark 5:19).

There were people who had believed on Him who were not part of this crowd and they certainly were saved. In fact, the actual house of the hemorrhaging woman that he healed actually became famous as an example of one who had been touched by Jesus, and there is no evidence that she was in this crowd. In fact, Jesus had told her to “go in peace” (Mark 5:34).

Furthermore, when Jesus addresses the seven churches of Revelation, He tells them to deal with some things, but He does not challenge them with this kind of mandate. He does not tell them to leave their cities and jobs. The reason of course was that He was no longer physically here on earth.

Now there are three main commands that one must follow if one is to actually follow Jesus Christ when He was here on earth:

COMMAND #1 – One must deny himself. 8:34b

Now carefully observe what is stated here. One is not asked to deny something to themselves; they are required to deny self.

Now the idea behind denying yourself was not the idea of getting up in the morning and saying today I am going to deprive myself of as many things as I can today. It is not getting up and saying I am going to work or not enjoying anything in life. It is not a commitment to living life as an ascetic hermit. It is not that at all.

When Jesus Christ was actually here on earth, to actually become one who followed Him, it meant you literally would have to deny yourself most things other people would enjoy every day. You would not be able to go to your nice home and sit down with your family because you would often spend the night out in some field or cave. You would not have nice meals prepared for you every day. In fact, you could go several days without even eating. You would not have the income you would normally have if you followed Christ because you weren't working your job anymore. These were things one really would have to deny self.

Now our denial in this Church Age takes on a new dimension. It perhaps could include some of the things Christ's disciples had to deny, but not typically. Even when we were at our poorest in school, we still had a home to live in and food to eat and a car to drive.

The application of a denial of self for us means to deny our self our own desires, ambitions and personal goals, which are contrary to God. We are willing to do this for the sake of the cause of Christ.

We do our best to submit ourselves to the Scriptures and to the Lord. We try to live life by a philosophy that says, “not my will but thy will.” We no longer live life in some self-sufficiency or self-focused way. We do care about what God would have us do. We live life depending on Him and doing His will.

This denial may work itself out in a variety of ways. To deny ourselves means we are willing to put ourselves subject to God and His Word. For one who is proud, it means to pursue being humble. For one who is greedy, it means to turn away from that thinking to a generous thinking. For one who is lustful, it means to not pursue them so they do not lead one into sin. For one who is complacent, it means to get active and more involved. For one who is shy, it means to become more bold.

In this Grace Age, denying self is a very personal and individual thing. But we do know that one who is yielding to the Holy Spirit will be willing to submit himself to God’s Word and ways rather than the ways of sinful self.

COMMAND #2 – One must take up his cross. 8:34c

This is the first mention of the cross in Mark’s gospel. The cross is the heart of the Gospel message. When you thought of a cross in the first century, it was anything but some nice iconic piece of jewelry to be worn or some cross tower to be displayed. The cross was the place where Romans executed people.

Now we tend to think our crosses are things like troubles or trials or struggles. We tend to view a cross as having to deal with someone at work or school who rubs us the wrong way. We tend to view a sickness or physical issue as our cross. We tend to view our own sinful nature and struggles as our cross.

But that is not what Jesus meant. Bearing a cross for this crowd meant being willing to suffer some very negative things for specifically following Jesus Christ and communicating truth about Him and the grace Gospel. You literally could end up dying on a cross if you physically followed Jesus Christ and proclaimed Him as the God/Savior/Messiah/King.

Luke adds that one must be willing to take up the cross “daily” (Luke 9:23). To take up a cross daily meant for this crowd to willingly join the ranks of the “despised and doomed” in this world every day. Every day people wanted to kill Christ; if you were going to follow Him, you could be killed yourself. For many of these apostles, it literally did mean that.

Now it is our responsibility to understand and communicate the truth about Jesus Christ and the Gospel. It is our job to proclaim the grace Gospel. It is our job to defend who Jesus Christ is. We must stand our ground for Jesus Christ and His cross work even if that means we experience negative threats and intimidations, which may lead to death, although for us it is probably not likely. If one is going to follow Jesus Christ, one must be willing to do this daily.

We must be people who daily take up the cross message no matter what the negatives. Now at this point each of us would do well to ask ourselves this question—Have we experienced any negative difficulties because we have closely followed Jesus Christ and accurately communicated His Word?

COMMAND #3 – One must follow me. **8:34d**

The verb is present tense. What this means is that if one wants to join His discipleship team, He must be willing to continually follow Jesus Christ until He ascends up into heaven. You must continually go with Him.

You cannot go your own way; you will have to go with Him in the way He is going. You could not get up one day and say I'll go my own way; one had to be willing to follow the God/Savior/Messiah/King.

Now there are four verses that follow that all begin with the conjunction “for.”

I want to point out a couple of critical points in this context that really help us unravel this:

- 1) This is given in the context of the “gospel” (**v. 35**).
- 2) This is given in the context of a coming future judgment of every person (**v. 38**).

If we look down at **verse 38**, we may assume that the actual fulfillment of these events take place when one must appear before Jesus Christ for judgment. There will come a point when one must face Jesus Christ and a critical factor of judgment will be did we defend Him and His Word or were we ashamed of Him and His Word?

The Gospel presents the need to commit one's soul to Jesus Christ. Future judgment of the soul becomes the basis for believing on Him, which this crowd had not done.

These verses give us reasons why one needs to believe in Jesus Christ and believe the Gospel:

Reason #1 - Those who wish to save themselves will lose, but those who trust their lives to Jesus Christ will win. **8:35**

You cannot save yourself. No one in this crowd could save themselves and we cannot either. So what that means is whoever is willing to come to Jesus Christ by faith and will turn his life over to Christ will be saved. But whoever wants to save his own life himself, will lose.

There is not a philosophy in existence in the religious world of Jesus' day or of our day that is as foreign as this one. Most people in this world believe that if you believe in yourself and live for yourself and invest in yourself and give to yourself and hoard for yourself, you will win. If you do the best you can and give it your best shot, you will succeed. You will get before God and God will let you come live with Him forever.

The Jewish leaders taught that if you obeyed their rules and their man-made traditions and laws, you would make it to heaven. Most of the religious world operates by a works system of salvation. Things haven't actually changed that much.

The prevailing attitude of most people is to look out for you and save yourself. What Jesus teaches is that you cannot save yourself by looking at you; you can be saved by looking at Him. Life is found in Him, not you. So when you turn your life over to Him, you are saved. If you are willing to invest your life for Christ and believing the Gospel and communicating the Gospel, you will win.

Now if you believe that you are going against the grain of our culture.

Reason #2 - There is no profit in gaining the world and losing your own soul. 8:36

There is a threat that tugs at all of us now and then and it is the threat of loving the world. Many spend their entire existence concerned with worldly security, worldly comfort and worldly ambition. They surround themselves with worldly things and are always looking to score big in the worldly jackpot. **The problem is very few concern themselves with their own soul.**

Now one assumption of this verse is that a person's soul is called to give an account before God.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can save a person's soul. So in order for one to be saved, he must believe in Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can save one from sin. That is exactly the message of the Gospel which He mentions in **verse 35**.

So for the sake of discussion, let's say you really make it. You climb the world's ladder and make it to the top. Anything you want you can have. You have plenty. You don't worry in this world about anything. So you live life your way and now it comes time for you to die.

So Jesus says in this verse, what would it profit you to rise in this world to a great level. You gain power and wealth and prominence in the world but then you get to the end of your life not having believed in Jesus Christ and you end up losing your own soul and going to hell.

You could literally gain the whole world and have the whole world at your fingertips and then forfeit your soul in eternity forever.

Reason #3 - What are you willing to exchange for your soul? **8:37**

Jesus was trying to convince this crowd they needed to believe in Him. Most had not believed in Him so He says—what in this world is worth your soul burning in hell? What in this life is worth the trade of your soul for all eternity?

If you get into hell, what will you be able to trade to get you out? The answer is **NOTHING**.

If you go into eternity without Jesus Christ, you will not be able to ever come up with something that will be able to get your soul out of hell. The righteousness of Christ is what saves the soul and you cannot exchange anything for your soul.

Reason #4 - Whoever has been ashamed of Me and My words on earth will end up ashamed before Me at judgment. **8:38**

Now Jesus was here on earth and He was up against a religious world that thought He was insane, demonic and out of His mind.

Now the loving of the world is in the context of being ashamed of Jesus Christ. There are many things to be ashamed about, but Jesus Christ is not one of those things.

Part of being a true believer is confessing Jesus Christ. Defending Him and defending the Word of God.

Now remember in **verse 31**, Jesus is identified as the Son of Man. We may recall that Daniel identifies the Son of Man as being the King of Kings who will come back and take over the entire world including “all the peoples, nations and men of every language” (Dan. 7:13-14).

So what we have described here is the second coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:29-31). This is not the Rapture of the Church. When Jesus Christ comes back, a critical factor of judgment for Israel will be whether or not people defended Jesus Christ and His words or were ashamed of Him and His words.

Now we may make a great application of this to our own lives. If we want to be ashamed of something, we need to be ashamed of ourselves and our sin. We should never be ashamed of Jesus Christ. We should be ashamed of how many times we have not obeyed the Word, but we should never be ashamed of the Word.