

## GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

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### **TEXT: MARK 8:34-38**

#### **Introduction:**

1. After rebuking Peter (Mark 8:33), our Lord “called the people unto Him” (Mark 8:34), signifying that what He was about to say was not for the twelve apostles alone, but for all who would follow Him.
2. Mark 8:34 says, “And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples...”
3. Our Lord knew that the crowds were following Him for the wrong reasons – some on account of His miracles; some thought He would overthrow the Roman government; some were merely curious; some liked to jump on the latest religious bandwagon; etc.
4. Our Lord knew that most of the people following Him were not genuine believers, because they were unwilling to pay the price to become true disciples.
5. Today there are large crowds following the so-called “prosperity preachers.” It is apparent that many of these people have never been genuinely saved. These Scriptures remind us that this so-called “prosperity gospel” (which is all over the TV and radio and in so-called Christian book stores) is a false gospel (8:34).
6. God does not want you to be rich and successful and live like a worldly movie star. He wants you to deny yourself and follow Jesus (8:34).
7. We deny self when we surrender ourselves completely to Christ and we make up our minds we are going to follow Him all the way no matter what.
8. It is interesting to compare Mark’s account with Luke’s. In Luke 9:23, it says, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily.” So this denying self must be done on a daily basis.

## **I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS**

## **II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL**

## **III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUL**

### **I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CROSS (MARK 8:34).**

1. Jesus said, “Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34b).
2. It is not the cross of Christ that the follower of Christ is to take up. No one but the Lord Himself could take that cross.
3. Our Lord said, let him “take up his cross” (8:34). This means there is a cross for you and there is a cross for me.

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,

And all the world go free?

No, there's a cross for everyone,

And there's a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above,  
Who once went sorrowing here!  
But now they taste unmingled love,  
And joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I'll bear  
Till death shall set me free;  
And then go home my crown to wear,  
For there's a crown for me.

Upon the crystal pavement down

At Jesus' pierced feet,

Joyful I'll cast my golden crown

And His dear Name repeat.

O precious cross! O glorious crown!

O resurrection day!

When Christ the Lord from Heav'n comes down

And bears my soul away. – Thomas Shepherd

4. I often hear people refer to “their cross to bear” and oftentimes it is obvious they do not understand what Jesus meant.
5. Our Lord is not referring to the common sufferings experienced in life but to that suffering and shame which the Christian assumes because of his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for the Gospel's sake.
6. The cross symbolizes the shame, persecution and abuse which the world heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The hymn writer referred to the cross as “the emblem of suffering and shame.”
7. The second stanza says, “Oh, that old rugged cross so despised by the world...”
8. The cross was the symbol of the hostile hatred of the world – the malignant, malicious, cruel treatment of mankind toward the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. The cross not only represents the hatred this world has for Jesus, it also represents the hatred this world has for Christians.
10. And it is this fierce animosity that causes many sinners and even many Christians to avoid the offence of the cross.

11. The apostle Paul refers to “the offence of the cross” in Galatians 5:11.
12. The offence of the cross is referred to in Hebrews 11:26 as “the reproach of Christ” (cf. Heb. 11:25, 26).
13. When you tell certain sinners they cannot get to heaven by their church membership or their baptism or their good deeds they often get angry. Paul was persecuted because he preached the cross (Gal. 5:11).
14. But there are few preachers like Paul today. Today preachers seem more concerned with making Christianity popular and appealing to the flesh than they do about preaching the cross (Mark 8:34).

Let me give you a recent example of this:

**“FRANKLIN GRAHAM: MINISTER OF CHRIST OR PRIEST OF BAAL?”** by Pastor Ralph Ovadal, Pilgrims Covenant Church, Monroe, Wisconsin, (<http://www.pccmonroe.org/neo-evangelicalism/2009.08.14.htm>.)

Less than a week ago, as I am writing this article, I, and members of our Pilgrims Covenant Church, spent over five hours “without the camp” preaching the gospel of Christ and bearing biblical witness against a carnal monstrosity called “Rock the River.” This event was one of four staged in Mississippi River cities by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. As of now, approximately 90,000 young people have been “ministered” to at the three Rock the River events that have already taken place.

Rock the River is the proud brainchild of BGEA president/CEO Franklin Graham, who also briefly preached the Graham gospel several times during each of the six to seven hour “Christian” rock concerts. Mr. Graham was very candid about his reason for making use of head-banging rock, hip-hop, and even a mosh pit set up by BGEA. “We’re just changing the lure. Kids today love rock music. We’re giving them the music they like and understand” (*Quad City Times*, Aug. 9, 2009). Now, much could and should be said about using sensual, in some cases even sexualized, rock bands to “lure” young people into hearing the gospel according to Franklin Graham. The same is true of Graham’s open collusion with Roman Catholics in the planning of Rock the River.

What I want to very briefly address here is Franklin Graham's notion of what is worship acceptable to the Lord. The Scriptures have much to say on that very issue, for instance: "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2), and, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7).

But apparently Mr. Graham holds the same philosophy as his rock-and-roll followers, including two young women I interviewed at the Rock the River event at which we ministered in Davenport on Saturday, August 8. After our time of preaching, passing out tracts, and holding signs, I assumed my Christian media identity and conducted an interview with two evangelical rockers who had apparently not come past my side of the large area where our three separate teams were witnessing. With pounding, ear-splitting music as the backdrop, I brought up that the Scriptures command that the Lord be worshiped with reverence and also "in the beauty of holiness." I asked them if Rock the River music fits that description. The young women confidently explained to me that "it depends on who you are as a person. Like, some people love this. And you have to worship as you do, and they have to worship as they do." But I asked again, "Is this music reverent?" Again, the god "I" was put forward as the ultimate authority in such matters. "I think it's awesome . . . I think it's perfect . . . I think for them that's reverent. For you it might be different . . . for them it's how they get it all out." Reverence, I was told, is different for everyone. And what of holiness? "I think it's how you view it."

Such is the ignorance and such are the resulting beliefs that allow, and seduce, young evangelicals into the "Christian" rock culture which is anything but Christian and into a worship of God which is really a frenzied, heathenish worship of another christ, with another gospel preached, and all of this by another spirit, not the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 11:4). But now consider Franklin Graham's canned media comment, fed to reporters at Rock the River towns and posted on the BGEA website: "As we head up the Mississippi River . . . we will be going against the currents of secularism, postmodernism, and the godless culture in which we live."

Sure. And evil is good and good is evil. And one bright day in the middle of the night, two dead boys got up to fight. Back to back they faced each other . . . etc.

But rather than risk reader fatigue, I will not attempt to describe in depth the ungodly looking characters and music Graham made use of to fight those evils he just mentioned. ... Suffice it to say, I am of the opinion that long-haired, ear-ringed men--in some cases wearing eye makeup--and sexualized, screaming, even growling women pumping out ear-splitting, demonic-sounding music while gyrating, writhing, and slamming around in front of immodestly dressed, crowd surfing, moshing, screaming fans is hardly the antithesis of “the godless culture in which we live.”

By the way, for those of you who do not know what crowd surfing is, that is when a rock fan is passed overhead from fan to fan – actually from hand to intimate hand. In fact, those who have a strong stomach can see on one of the links provided a young lady being passed around at Rock the River while a wild female “Christian” singer wails and a very long-haired “male” guitar player flings himself around like a whirling dervish. Another video clip shows the same woman singer make guttural sounds, driving the crowd into even more of a frenzy. This band appeared to be a real crowd pleaser, but they were certainly not out of the ordinary among Rock the River bands.

There was no attempt whatsoever to ban or stop the crowd surfing at Graham's Rock the River events. But I suppose that too could be considered a lure to bring in young men for that “awesome” moment when Graham counts all the hands to signify a “decision for Christ” – like the young Catholic woman who wrote on her blog that she and her friend raised their hands for fun because they were so bored by Graham’s preaching!

And then there was the mosh pit which BGEA, at Graham’s direction, set up in front of the stage at each Rock the River concert. Young people who wanted to mosh to the frenzied music were invited into the pit to enjoy themselves. Simply put, people mosh by physically slamming themselves into each other and trying to throw each other to the ground. A dictionary definition puts it this way: “to engage in a form of frenzied, violent dancing; slam-dance.”

Now at this juncture I want to make very, very clear what Franklin Graham made abundantly clear in the media, what his performers made clear over and over from the stage in our hearing, and what Rock the River fans insisted to us repeatedly with absolutely no shame. What I have been describing--the music, the body surfing, and

the moshing--was all said to be worshipping the Lord and praising Him!

Before I close, please allow me to add a little information on the subject of moshing at Rock the River. I will first repeat, the mosh pit was set up by the BGEA. It was set up to be used during the “worship” time, when the “Christian” bands were playing. In fact, consider this from the BGEA web site “real-time updates from Rock the River in Quad Cities”: “And now Fireflight’s out, bringing their female-fronted heavy alternative rock. . . . the audience of thousands is loving it! Kids of all ages and stripes are out here, moshing as one.” Further, the official Rock the River Facebook page, run by BGEA personnel, was happy to have testimonies such as these posted:

Brook - i got kicked in the face by a crowd surfer when flyleaf was playing =D yes I'm proud of that July 20 at 2:22pm

Haley - Omg it was amazing i just got home....my neck hurts so bad from headbanging....omg wish i could c them all again! August 2 at 10:50pm

{Note: “omg” is shorthand for “Oh My God.” Exodus 20:7 says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”}

Heather - I just got home from it i took amazing pics cause i was n the pit n the very front row i got smashed during flyleaf and kicked n the face also ill have a black eye 2morrow but it was all worth it i was a counselor and 1 of the people i talked 2 got saved and that was all GODS doing not mine so PRAY 4 ALL THE PEOPLE WHO MADE DECISION on augest 2nd August 3 at 12:39am

Jayde - omg! this girl was crowd surfing and she fell and broke her neck! me and shelby saw her. she looked pretty bad. praying for her. Yesterday at 8:12pm · Report

Ah yes, and all for the glory of God, done with reverence and in the beauty of holiness. This is called “going against the currents of . . . the godless culture in which we live.” Such is the witness of “Christian” worship also set forth, compliments of Franklin Graham, to the world on the Internet and in the print media. Consider these quotes from “Christian” moshers in an excerpt from a Louisiana newspaper, *The*

*Advocate.*

Will Dover, 19, of Lafayette, was celebrating his birthday, and danced so hard he could barely stand by the end of the set. “I like this stripped-down version of Christianity,” Dover said. “I like to just scream for Jesus.”

Andrew Reinhardt, 17, also of Lafayette, said he was there with his Asbury United Methodist Church youth group. “I like to throw down in the name of Jesus.”

John Ervin, 15, of Walker, was there with his church youth group, Walker Baptist. “I like to throw down with these guys I just met. I’m a mosher.”

Farther back in the crowd, Emmanuel Stewart, 14, and Chris Schultz, 21, were waiting for Mary Mary to take the stage at around 6:30 p.m. “This is a good time to get out and worship with all these people,” Schultz said.

Now, I need to get to that conclusion I mentioned. Franklin Graham considers himself a preacher of the gospel, a minister of God. But I ask the reader – in fact, I challenge the whole Christian church to judge righteous judgment by the Scriptures. True ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ do not facilitate, promote, and encourage crude, frenzied, sexualized, even violent worship as acceptable to the Lord. No, just the contrary. It is the heathens who have always worshipped their false gods in that very way. Certainly the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel come immediately to mind as one example. So my conclusion then is that Franklin Graham is no minister of Christ; rather he is a minister of Baal and ought to be exposed, rebuked, and resisted for the glory of God and the good of His church.

Rock music and all of the other foolishness – mosh pits and crowd surfing – is popular with this mixed-up generation, but cross-bearing has never been popular or pleasing and it never will be – deny yourself, and take up your cross (8:34).

This is why Jesus said the road is narrow that leadeth unto eternal life; and the road is wide that leadeth to destruction (Matt. 7:13, 14).

I have had many people tell me that our church would be so much larger if we would just lower the standards and tone down the preaching. That is probably true but I wonder how many of these new people would be genuinely saved (Mark 8:34).

One thing I know – it would not be pleasing to God, because His Word says, “Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2).

15. In contrast, consider these words from AW Tozer:

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique – a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam’s proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor.

The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually. The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level.

Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill-seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under death sentence. There is no commutation and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they may appear or beautiful to the eyes of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In

coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him. What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus?

How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The

cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon this message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries. The mystics, the reformers, the revivalists have put their emphasis here, and signs and wonders and mighty operations of the Holy Ghost gave witness to God's approval.

Dare we, the heirs of such a legacy of power, tamper with the truth? Dare we with our stubby pencils erase the lines of the blueprint or alter the pattern shown us in the Mount? May God forbid. Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power. (The OLD CROSS and the NEW)

## **II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL (MARK 8:35).**

1. In Mark 8:35 our Lord says, “But whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”
2. What does our Lord mean by “the gospel’s sake” (cf. Mark 10:29, 30)? Christ is known to us only through the Gospel.
3. And what is the gospel? In I Cor. 15:1-4 we find the definition of the Gospel.
4. In Mark 1:15, Jesus says, “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.” A sinner cannot be saved unless he repents and believes the Gospel.
5. In Romans 1:1, Paul said that he was “separated unto the Gospel of God.” Are you separated from the world and separated unto the Gospel of God?
6. Our adherence to the Gospel means our loyalty to Christ.
7. In I Cor. 4:15, the apostle Paul says, “I have begotten you through the Gospel.” In other words, we are born again through the preaching of the Gospel.
8. Have you been born again “through the Gospel”? First Peter 1:23 says, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”
9. True devotion to Christ means preaching His Gospel to sinners far and wide. This is what it means to follow Christ (cf. Mark 16:15, 16).

### **III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUL (MARK 8:36, 37).**

1. Mark 8:36 has been called “the most solemn question” in the Bible. Our Lord is asking two hypothetical questions in verses 36 & 37. Of course, no one can gain the whole world.

2. Alexander the Great couldn't gain the whole world. Alexander the Great thought he had conquered the whole world, but then he died a drunkard at the age of 33. His last words were, "There are no other worlds to conquer!"
3. Julius Caesar couldn't gain the whole world. Napoleon couldn't gain the whole world.
4. The antichrist will try to gain the whole world, but even with Satan's help he will not be successful.
5. Our Lord is saying, "Even if a man *could* gain the whole world, would it be worth it if he loses his own soul?" Our Lord's question emphasizes the incomputable and immeasurable value of the human soul.
6. Referring to this most solemn question, the great evangelist R.A. Torrey said, "This question has led thousands of men and women to pause in their mad folly that was hurrying them on toward eternal perdition, to reflect and to change their course."
7. There is a contrast here between the soul of man and "the whole world" (a life estranged from God).
8. Consider the intrinsic value of the soul. When we consider the value of a soul, let us remember that the soul of man was made in the image of God. The soul will live somewhere forever – God has gifted it with immortality. Therefore it is precious.
9. And if the soul is so precious to God, how fearful then for a man to lose his own soul!
10. The soul is so precious and valuable that both Satan and God are after it. First Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."
11. The soul is very precious because Christ paid for it with His own blood. If Christ died to save your soul it must be very valuable indeed.

12. The soul is valuable because of its capabilities. Man was not created by God so that he would waste his life in sin and folly, and then be cast off into the fires of hell.
13. No. Man was created in the image of God so that he could enjoy blessed fellowship with God for all eternity.
14. The number one question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?”
15. The answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”
16. When our Lord said, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world,” He was referring to this world and all it contains – wealth, honor, power, worldly pleasures, and everything that appeals to the flesh.
17. What good is it to gain everything that this sinful world has to offer – position, power, prestige, popularity, and all the money you could want – and then die and go to hell?
18. What good is it to gain all of this and then see them all vanish at death as the lost soul falls into the depths of hell?

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. The great evangelist RA Torrey said, “It has been my lot to be thrown in with a great many of this world’s multi-millionaires, some of the very richest of them on both sides of the Atlantic, and never yet have I met one single man who was satisfied with his money. I was once invited to dinner by the heir to one of the largest fortunes in the world, and after dinner he opened his heart to me and told me how utterly unsatisfied he was.”
2. Torrey told the story of Barney Barnato, an Englishman who made a fortune in diamonds in South Africa. Barnato became one of the richest men in the world, but it did not make him happy. He took to heavy drinking and he

became suicidal. His friends employed a man to watch him at all times because they were concerned that he would kill himself.

3. One day on a steamer heading back to England, when his bodyguard was not paying attention, Barney Barnato ran to the rail of the ship and jumped out into the Atlantic Ocean and drowned.
4. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

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