

Take Up Your Cross

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[0 : 00] Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection. And we'll be continuing this week in Mark chapter 8 starting at verse 31. You'll remember from last week we hit this hinge in the book, this high point where Peter finally confesses Christ, understands his identity not just as Jesus a man but also as God himself.

But we'll find out here as we continue that Peter knows very little of what he's saying. And so as we continue I'm going to invite you to turn now with me. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn with me in your worship guide. You can turn with me in your phone. No matter where you turn remember that this is God's word and God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go. And so that's why we read now together Mark chapter 8 starting at verse 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. And he said this plainly and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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.

Verse 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. For whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man's again the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

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.

[2 : 25] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven we come to you as we often do easily distracted with our minds on many different things. We ask that you would help us to focus now on one thing. That is you speak to us in your word like a good father to his children. That you would help us to be attentive. That you would open our ears and our eyes. That you'd clear our minds. That you'd soften our hearts. That we would be able to hear and see and understand and believe everything that you've written in your word. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

I know that many of you are familiar with the 1987 cult classic, The Princess Bride, which tells the story of a woman named Buttercup who has true love with a farmhand named Wesley, but of course she encounters a variety of obstacles. One of which is that she's kidnapped by three men.

And one of those three is a Sicilian named Vizzini who has this favorite word that he likes to say over and over again, which is inconceivable.

The problem is that he uses this word in situations that are extremely conceivable. He sees something happening right in front of him and then he says, well of course this can't be happening. And so it reaches this tension point.

There's another kidnapper named Inigo Montoya who finally says to him these famous words. You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

[4 : 20] Mark chapter 8 verses 31 through 38 is Jesus' Inigo Montoya moment with Peter. Peter has just confessed Christ.

He has said that Jesus is the anointed one. He is not just a prophet or a priest or a king. He is the prophet, the priest, and the king. And Peter, like Vizzini, has no idea what that word actually means.

He is using the right word for Jesus and he has the wrong meaning. And so that's why in this story Jesus jumps in explaining things, verse 32, to them plainly.

He is no longer doing what he did in Mark chapter 4 where he would explain things in parables that needed to be understood with additional explanation. Instead, he tells them clearly that being the Messiah, being the Son of Man, means something different than what Peter and the Jews of that time expected.

It meant that he would suffer, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed. And this is the opposite of what they expect.

[5 : 36] If Jesus is the Christ, does that not mean that he is the king? And what is it that kings do? Kings do not die. Kings don't get killed.

Kings do the killing. Jesus has flipped something upside down. This is complete nonsense that he is talking. And so Peter here so helpfully steps in once again to get Jesus back on the right track.

Verse 32, Peter takes him aside and begins to rebuke him. This is similar to what we saw in chapter 6 when Jesus was feeding the 5,000. Remember, the disciples pulled him aside to remind him that these people who'd been listening to him for so long obviously needed to leave and get something to eat.

It is hard to keep Jesus on track. In fact, it may seem at times to the disciples that Jesus is so heavenly-minded that he is of no earthly good.

And so Peter here just needs to help Jesus understand what it is that it means to be the Christ or the Messiah. No, Jesus, you're not going to be killed.

[6 : 47] You're going to kill. You're not going to be trampled. You're going to come and crush the Romans for us. You're either going to be the one who finally brings the dreams and hopes of the Jewish nation to a culmination.

But it is Peter, like Venzini, who is completely wrong. It is Peter who does not know what the word Christ means.

And so that's why Jesus here, verse 33, turns and rebukes him. There's a parallel here. Verse 32, Peter rebukes Jesus. Verse 33, the same word, Jesus rebukes Peter in these strong words.

Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Now, Peter here has not somehow mysteriously transformed into Satan.

He's not been possessed in some way. What Jesus is saying is that the work of Satan is the work that takes Jesus away from the cross. And so the words that Peter is speaking are words that are opposed to Jesus and his mission.

[8 : 02] It's at this moment with this background that Jesus then calls in this larger group. He wants to talk to more than just the 12 about the true meaning of this word.

That's why verse 34, we see him call the crowd together with him, together with his disciples before he gives them this important teaching. In his rebuke to Peter, he helps us understand that there are two ways and only two ways to live in this world.

Look with me at verse 33. You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man. The things of God versus the things of man.

And Jesus is going to explain that here. Verses 35 through 37, we begin to understand what the things of man look like. Verse 35, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

Verse 36, he goes on to explain what it means to try to save your life. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

[9 : 12] For what can a man give in return for his soul? In other words, living by the things of man means that we want power, wealth, honor, influence, and success now.

The person who wants the things of this world, there's an economic undertone. Verse 37, what can a man give in return for his soul? In other words, how much money would it take to buy your soul?

Never enough. You can never experience so much success in this life that the economic trade-off is worth it. How would you do that though?

How would you gain the entire world? How is it that you would experience that honor and success, that glory, everything that you want right now? Jesus makes it clear to us.

Verse 38, for whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation. In other words, there are many nice and wonderful and kind people who are living according to the way of the world.

[10 : 28] There are many nice and wonderful and kind people whose beliefs and views and commitments change based on what is best for me right now.

They are gaining temporary things that this world has to offer at the expense of Jesus. You can save your life, and when Jesus says save your life, he means save it now.

You can save your life and gain the whole world, but you'll be ashamed of me and my words. You cannot have Jesus and everything that this world has to offer right now.

You cannot have Jesus and everything this world has to offer right now. Peter is looking for a conquering king here and now. He is looking for Jesus to do something in that time and that place that will look extremely powerful in the eyes of the world.

And Jesus is saying that his power and his kingdom in all its fullness and glory is something that is saved for the future. Because right now, it is suffering and sacrifice.

[11 : 44] Here's what the things of God really look like. Verse 34. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

Now, it's important for us to remember that the idea of the cross, the image of the cross, was not something sentimental at this time. It would not have been something that people would have worn as necklaces or as jewelry.

Instead, the cross was this symbol of incredible shame and dishonor and suffering. The cross was only for people who were outcasts of society.

It would have been typical if someone was crucified for the vertical piece of the cross to already be waiting for them. And so Jesus is giving them a real image that they would have understand.

Someone who carried their cross would have taken that horizontal bar and they would have put it on their shoulder as they took the trip to their crucifixion. To carry your cross then meant at least two things.

[12 : 44] First, it meant you were on your journey to death. If you saw someone carrying that horizontal bar, you knew that within a matter of hours, they would no longer be alive.

In addition, it meant that you were an object of incredible shame. If someone saw you carrying your cross, they would know that you were the worst of the worst. They would know that you were not just a regular criminal, you were a terrible criminal.

They would know that you hadn't just made a small mistake, but that you had denied the world. And so Jesus is telling Peter here, you are looking to honor and success and victory now.

But instead, if you follow me, you are going to lose pleasure and comfort and ease. You are going to lose social status. You are going to lose this world to be connected with me and my words.

In other words, there is an inevitable conflict and collision with this world if and when and as we follow after Jesus. We cannot escape it.

[13 : 59] There will always be a loss. Christianity is not an extracurricular to add on to an otherwise beautiful life.

It is instead the way of life. It is a completely different orientation with different loves and goals and objectives. It's like we've talked about before that Christianity is a keystone commitment, not an accessory commitment.

It will limit how much we experience of the goodness of this world as we look forward to the goodness in the future. When we were going through 1 and 2 Peter, I told you some stories from the book Candles Behind the Wall, which tells the story of the church under communism.

One of the stories it tells is of the pressures that teenagers experienced during this time is they were strongly encouraged to take part in communist youth organizations.

Even more than strongly encouraged, it was known that if you did not take part in these organizations, you would be limited in two ways. You'd be limited in the type of school you would be able to attend or whether you'd be able to attend school at all, and you would be limited in the type of job that you would be able to have.

[15 : 18] In other words, Christians made a lot less money if they chose to remain faithful. Doors were closed. Opportunities were closed to them.

And so she tells the story of two sisters, Marsha and Vera Borisov, who were on their way to becoming incredible surgeons. They had studied hard in school and they were extremely successful.

The only problem is they had to meet each of them with a commission who would examine them as to whether they would be allowed to continue in their education. They were told they met and they're asked this question, why was she not a member of this communist youth organization?

Maybe it's because you're a Christian believer. One of the examining professors ventured probingly. Both girls had read the Bible since their childhood and they knew well the passage where Jesus said, I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.

But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. And that's from Luke chapter 12. As Marsha stood before the committee of 30, all of whom were waiting for her answer, she remembered this verse.

[16 : 33] She imagined the company of heaven looking on at that moment to see how she would answer the question. She knew what answer she had to give regardless of what the commission thought.

Yes, she said, I am a Christian. Interrogated separately, her sister Vera gave the same answer. The result of the committee's examinations of both girls was predictable.

They were rejected. Because they knew the word of God, they stood firm and confessed Christ.

Those girls knew the truth of what Jesus says here. Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Everyone wants to be a gangster until it's time to do gangster things. Everyone wants to be a disciple of Jesus until it's time to do disciple things.

[17 : 46] Following Jesus means loss in this world. In our economic lives, it is difficult, if not impossible, to live a life of constant consumption and peak experiences if we are following Jesus' call to a life of radical generosity and hospitality and service.

in our community lives, it is difficult, if not impossible, to only hang out with those who look like us and think like us if we are following Jesus' call to base our communities around the gospel rather than our preferences and hobbies.

It is difficult, if not impossible, in our vocational lives to make it all the way up the corporate ladder in the world of the West unless you're willing to celebrate lies and sexual perversion.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to teach the next generation to love and follow Jesus without sacrifices and trade-offs.

Following Jesus in this world comes at a cost. There is a price for valuing him above everything else.

[19 : 11] So I've made a pretty bad sales pitch here. And the question is this, why would you choose that? Why would you want to lose out on all those good and wonderful and beautiful things?

Why would you say no for gathering with an awkward group of people like us on Sunday morning? Thankfully, Jesus does not just provide a call to obedience here.

He also helps us understand what gives us the motivation and the power and the love to keep going. And it is this, that Christians live for something greater and higher.

Christians have a more expansive view of the world and view of the future. Remember from that story, what was it that she imagined all around her, but the angels looking on to hear her answer to the question from that commission.

Why would you deny yourself unless there is something greater and more precious and more valuable? How do we put aside the temptations of this world?

[20 : 18] Well, the answer is here right for us in this text. Verse 34 provides a sandwich at the beginning and at the end of this suffering that he talks about. If anyone would come after me, suffering, suffering, suffering, suffering, follow me.

Jesus is at the beginning and the end. He is the sandwich of this statement. This begins and ends with us keeping Jesus clear in our sights as he is the vision that we have in front of us.

We are trading honor now for honor later. Verse 38 tells us what it is that we're headed for. If whoever is ashamed of me and 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.

If that's true for those who are ashamed, what is true for those who remain faithful? Well, it's the opposite. Whoever is associated with Jesus and his words no matter what in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man come back and say, well done, good and faithful servant.

of him will the Son of Man come back and welcome into his kingdom. Of him will the Son of Man give a large embrace.

[21 : 47] Christians are able to put aside the things of this world that might pull us away because we have such a greater and brighter future to look forward to. We are not carrying our cross, period.

we are carrying our cross following Jesus. Jesus is the reason that this is worth it.

He tells us in verse 38 that he is coming back and so Christians look forward to that day. In the spring of 2009, I went on a traveling study abroad program that I have mentioned a few other times over the years and one of the places that we went to was Italy and we spent about two weeks in the city of Rome.

While we were in Rome, there was a point at which we were supposed to go out to this fancy dinner with some alumni of our college who were going to teach us some things about wine. It was sort of decided by many people in this group that we were going to dress up for this event.

Now, one of my friends was on this trip and right before she left, she had started dating a man that she was madly in love with him and he was madly in love with her.

[23 : 08] She had already committed to the study abroad trip. So they started dating maybe two months before she left the country for four or five months. And so they did their best to keep in touch and of course he was looking forward to the day and she was looking forward to the day when she would come back to the United States and they would be reunited.

As we went to this dinner she did not dress up unlike all the other girls on the trip. As I talked to her on the way she explained to me I only want to dress up for him.

I don't care what anyone else thinks. Brothers and sisters as we go through this world we are looking forward to the verse 38 moment when we are reunited with Christ and the Son of Man is coming on the clouds.

We do not care what anyone else thinks. We do not dress up for anyone else. We only want to look good for him.

Jesus opinion is the only opinion we care about. That's why we come back week after week and gather together that we can remind one another of what is true in the present and what would be true in the future that we would never lose sight that our perspective would say true that the horizon line that we look toward would be the correct one it would be the one that is high enough there's a woman named Zane Asher who's currently a news anchor for CNN National and in April of this year she released her autobiography called Where the Children Take Us and she tells this unlikely story of how she was raised by a mom who was both a widow and an immigrant from Nigeria in South London and despite her difficult circumstances against all these odds

[25 : 23] Zane goes on to become a student at Oxford she then goes on to work for CNN much of it because of her mom's vision when Zane was 13 years old her mom created this dream for her that she was going to attend Oxford University now at the same time that her mother had given her this vision this dream of her future Zane also discovered how fun it was to party and so about a year later she had found out that she could sneak out at night and if she was careful she'd be able to experience everything that London had to offer and then she could sneak back and her mom would be none the wiser until one night she came in around 3 a.m.

and her mom finally caught her now you have this strict mother with great dreams for her daughter what do you expect to happen at this point you expect maybe she would be grounded maybe there would be increased discipline and punishment but in fact her mother does something very different she tells us this she was angry but rather than punishing me as she ordinarily might have she took me back to visit Oxford less than a year after our first trip we made the 60 mile pilgrimage once again to wander those hallowed streets this time we stayed a little longer and again we returned happy and inspired in this way a mother daughter tradition was born that spanned the entirety of my teenage years whenever I misbehaved or stayed out later than I should I was never grounded or spanked or forced to do chores instead my mother would take me back to visit

Oxford to show me something better to aspire to brothers and sisters when we are tempted to turn away from Christ when we believe that what this world has to offer is better than what Jesus gives us the answer is not greater discipline or self control the answer is that we fill our minds and our hearts again with the vision of the future that is true we remember that Jesus is coming on the clouds and we will let nothing get in the way and a few years later Zane became a student at Oxford verse 35 for whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it 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 let's pray our father in heaven we thank you this morning that you don't simply call us to obedience but you have adopted us as your sons and your daughters and you've given us all the privileges that come with that that we have an inheritance that is protected and safe to look forward to and even more than that we have you with us physically separated from sin and death and suffering forever we ask that you would create a vision in our hearts and our minds that would be greater than anything else that this world could offer that you would let large things eclipse small things that beautiful things would block out ugly things we thank you that you do this by your word and we ask that you continue to grow us to love and follow you we ask these things in the mighty name of

Jesus Christ amen