

The Cost of Discipleship

- Mark 8:31-34
- I heard about a pastor who was standing at the door shaking hands as the congregation departed. He grabbed one man by the hand and pulled him aside. The pastor said to him, "You need to join the Army of the Lord!" The man replied, "I'm already in the Army of the Lord, pastor." The pastor said, "How come I don't see you except for Christmas and Easter?" He whispered back, "I'm in the secret service."
- Nope. If Jesus had been in the secret service, we would all be lost. And listen, saints. Our marching orders have not changed. Because this nation was never going to be revived by elections. Or demonstrations. It will only be revived by the power of the Spirit at work in the church. Presidents can help or hurt the people they lead but they cannot save them. They cannot change their hearts. They cannot give them lasting joy and hope that does not disappoint. They can preside over a nation but only Christ can reside in the hearts of men and women. Our hope is found in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah didn't go to the bar. He didn't go to the golf course. He didn't go home and close his door. In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah went to the temple. He went to church, and there he saw the Lord sitting on his throne, high and lifted up. He heard the Lord speak. He understood his calling, that the Lord was sending him to speak to the nation. The king had died. Not God. Isaiah was called to serve four kings, but his calling came from God. So does yours, and mine. No, we cannot be secret service Christians. Because the truth of the gospel was hung on a cross and lifted up for all the world to see. At this point in the gospel of Mark, the disciples do not understand that, and all the implications it has for how they are to live.
- They have identified that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. But they do not have a correct understanding of what that means. So, verse 31, "And he began to teach them..." And verse 32, "He said this plainly." Or, boldly, confidently. Jesus loved them by boldly and confidently teaching them the truth. He tells them that he must suffer many things, he must be rejected by the religious establishment, he must be killed, and after three days he must rise again. They do not understand the Gospel, and they must, so Jesus tells them the truth.
- As Jesus "began to teach them," in verse 32, Peter "began to rebuke him." We are horrified at this, but remember, Peter at this point did not see Jesus with clear vision. Peter, like all of his contemporaries, did not see a Suffering Messiah. Those two words could not possibly be used in the same sentence. Triumphant Messiah? Ok, sounds good. Suffering Messiah? No way. But Jesus knows that Peter is being used by Satan at that moment to try and derail the Lord from his path. Satan tried in the wilderness; he tries again here with the leader of the disciples. Jesus rebukes Satan, and says to Peter, "Your mind is on the things of man, not the things of God." Then Jesus continues to teach, after calling the crowd together to hear along with the twelve.
- This is as clear a call to follow Jesus as anything in the Bible. He explains what it means to walk, as they used to say, "in the dust of the rabbi." A disciple would follow his master closely enough so that the very dust from the rabbi's feet as he walked would get on the disciples' clothing. Jesus says to all his followers, "If anyone desires to come after me," there are three things you must do, and you can only do by the power of God's grace.

1. Let him deny himself...

- From an unknown source comes an article titled, "How To Be Miserable." It says, "Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use "I" as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you. Never forget a service you have rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others."
- Or this little ditty: "I gave a little tea party this afternoon, at 3. Twas very small, 3 guests in all - I, myself, and me. *Myself* ate all the sandwiches while *I* drank all the tea. Twas also I who ate the pie and passed the cake to me."
- Now, listen. These are funny (and painful!), but I bet we can all see ourselves in them. That's why Jesus said what he did to those who would follow him: fundamentally it requires a change that requires death. Steven Curtis Chapman talked about it in his song *The Change*: "well I've got this way of thinking, that comes so naturally, where I believe the whole world is revolving around me; And I got this way of living that I have to die to every single day..." Jesus said, first, deny yourself.
- The Greek word is *arneomai*, which means 'refuse, repudiate, disown someone or something.' Same word used in Mt. 26:34, "you will deny me three times." How can the same man who said, "You are the Christ," call down curses on himself at Jesus' trial and swear, "I never knew the man!" Because the heart is easily given to self-protection!
- William Hendriksen writes, "A person who denies himself gives up all reliance on whatever he is by nature, and depends for salvation on God alone...he must once and for all say No to his old self, the self as it is apart from regenerating grace."
- These ideas of discipleship are borne out in the message of the Gospel as we have been studying it. Jesus' gentle rebuke to the disciples in the feeding of the five thousand when he told them, "You give them something to eat," was a call to die to themselves and their own self-reliance, which was demonstrated in their response to the needs around them: "send these people away, Lord!" I know that whenever I want to just send my problems away or run and hide from difficult things or difficult people, I have fallen back into that way of thinking, that my little world revolves around me. And thinking that more than anything else, I need to protect myself. That's the opposite of what Jesus says we are to do.
- So, how does a disciple of Jesus deny himself? Jesus says he must...

2. ...Take up his cross daily.

- Let's not trivialize the meaning of taking up our cross by saying things like, "Well, I have some arthritis in my shoulder that limits my golf swing, but that's my cross to bear." Or, "I have the wicked witch of the north for a mother-in-law, but that's just my cross I have to bear."
- NO! When Jesus told them to take up their cross, every person in that crowd would have an image flash through his mind. If a man was condemned to die on a Roman cross, the

moment he was sentenced to death, if he wasn't whipped first, he would be given a crossbeam to carry to the place of his own execution. It was a one-way trip. He would not be back. Everyone knew they would never see this individual again, at least not in this lifetime.

- Luke records that Jesus said a follower must "take up his cross *daily*." In other words, to follow Jesus means to live each day as a man condemned to die would live his last day. Think about it. Is a man who is condemned to die that day worried about what others think of him? Is he concerned about what he's going to wear for his execution? Is he worried about his 401-K or his retirement plan, or even his burial plot? No, in fact according to Roman law a person condemned to die would forfeit his estate and even his right to be buried. This man is free, if you will, to focus on one thing: how he will die that day. He has nothing else in his life at that time; it has all been stripped away and the final thing, his life is about to end. The follower of Jesus Christ is called to voluntarily lay down his life every day, and be free to think about one thing: his life in Christ; how will he die to himself that day?
- The world has been turned upside down by men and women who have chosen to live this way. Go back with me to 155AD to find frail Polycarp, white-haired Bishop of Smyrna, as he stands before the Roman proconsul in a stadium full of Romans chanting, "Away with the atheists!" (Christians were called "atheists" because they did not believe in the traditional Roman gods.) He is an old man now, but in his youth, Polycarp had been a disciple of the Apostle John himself. When the magistrate pressed him, and said, 'Swear, and I will release you; revile Christ,' Polycarp said, 'Eighty-six years have I been serving him, and he has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?' Refusing to recant, he is bound to a stake and burned before the eyes of the multitude.
- Deny yourself by taking up your cross every day. Those are our marching orders.
- Oswald Chambers said, "All heaven is interested in the cross of Christ, all hell is terribly afraid of it, while men and women are the only beings who more or less ignore its meaning."

3. ...and follow Me.

- When Jesus says, "follow Me," he uses the present imperative, which indicates continuous action. What is Jesus commanding?
- John 8:12-- following Jesus means walking in light. Discipleship is learning more and more to live in the light, and staying out of the darkness.
- John 10:4-- following Jesus means learning to hear his voice and learning to quickly flee from the voice of the enemy.
- John 12:26-- following Jesus means learning to serve him.
- A disciple followed his master closely enough to the point that when you saw a disciple, you saw the master. They tried to walk like them and talk like them and gesture like them. When the world sees a disciple of Jesus Christ who is running a business, he ought to be able to say, "That's how Jesus would run a business if He were here running a business." When the world sees a disciple in the classroom, teaching a class, they ought to be able to say "That's how Jesus would teach a class if He were in the

classroom today.” That’s how Jesus would build a house or sell a product or take care of his customers or raise a child or manage a household. That’s what it means to be a disciple.

- ...and follow Me. How would the disciples who heard that word from Jesus relate it to just the activities of their most recent days? I believe they might have said to themselves, “Hey, this means we are sent out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal and minister to the sick. It means we will take what little we have and ask the Lord to use it to feed the hungry souls all around us. It means we will not be afraid to speak the truth about who Jesus is, that He is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, and there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” In all this, we point to Christ.
- Prayer