

Mark 8 (34-38) – Will You Pass the Test?

The narrative of redemption is hardwired into our souls. Even in a children's story like the 1971 movie *Wille Wonka & The Chocolate Factory*.

Here's the basic story. Charlie is a poor boy who looks inside a candy store but can't afford to buy any. Going home, he passes Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, which is shrouded in mystery. And Wonka announces that he has hidden five golden tickets in chocolate Wonka Bars. Finders of the tickets will receive a factory tour and a lifetime supply of chocolate. The first four tickets are found by the gluttonous boy Augustus Gloop; the spoiled girl Veruca Salt, a constantly gum-chewing girl Violet Beauregarde, and the television-obsessed boy Mike Teevee. As each winner is announced on television, a sinister-looking man appears and whispers to them.

The next day, Charlie is on his way home from school when he finds money in a gutter and uses it to buy candy. And he buys a Wonka Bar for his Grandpa Joe. Then he hears that there is still one more golden ticket to be found. So, Charlie opens his Wonka Bar, and there is the final golden ticket. And then the same sinister-looking man seen whispering to each winner appears. He introduces himself as Slugworth. And he offers a reward for a sample of Wonka's latest and greatest creation, the Everlasting Gobstopper. It's a candy which changes flavors and never gets any smaller.

Returning home with the golden ticket, Charlie tells Grandpa Joe, who leaps out of bed for the first time in twenty years. The next day, Willy Wonka greets the ticket winners at the front gates of the factory and leads them inside, where each signs a contract before the tour.

During the tour, the character flaws of each child are revealed as they each give in to temptation, resulting in their dismissal from the tour. But Charlie and his grandpa enter the Fizzy Lifting Drinks room unbeknownst to the others. The drink makes them float up and have a near-fatal encounter with the ceiling fan, but burping allows them to float back to the ground.

At the end of the tour, Charlie and Grandpa Joe are now the only remaining guests. But Wonka goes back to his office without awarding them the promised lifetime supply of chocolate. Grandpa Joe and Charlie enter his office to ask about it. But Willie Wonka angrily informs them that they will get *nothing*. They had violated the contract when they stole the Fizzy Lifting Drinks, thereby forfeiting their prize, just like the others had.

Joe gets angry at Wonka and suggests that Charlie give Slugworth the Everlasting Gobstopper. But Charlie decides to return the candy to Wonka instead. All of a sudden, Wonka joyously declares that Charlie wins! He reveals that Slugworth is actually his employee, Mr. Wilkinson. The offer to buy the Gobstopper was a test for the ticket winners. And Charlie passed the test. Then they enter a glass elevator, that flies out of the factory. Wonka tells Charlie that the test was to determine who would inherit everything that was his. But no one was able to fully resist temptation. Everyone failed the standard. Yet, because Charlie handed the Everlasting Gobstopper back to Wonka, he passed the test. And he inherited Wonka's kingdom.

I know that the author of that story didn't intend to shine a light on the gospel of Jesus Christ. But our souls cannot escape our need for redemption. And throughout history, stories have been told that reflect the power of temptation, the condition of the human heart, and the glorious grace of God. And *Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory* reflects a truth about a test that Jesus told us about nearly two thousand years ago, in our text today.

So, now, let's read Mark 8:36-37 again. *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?* Jesus is telling the true story, about you. You have been given a valuable gift. It's yours to do with as you please. And it's the most wonderful thing you could ever have, the most wonderful thing that anyone could ever have. It's worth everything, it's more valuable than the whole world. Because of this gift, anything you might gain is still less than what you've already got. And because of this gift, anything you might lose will never subtract from you having it all. What a gift! And you have it!

God has given every person a gift that is more valuable than the entire universe. But this gift is actually a test of what you will do with it. And the reward for passing this test is far greater than you can imagine.

You will go through a lot of tests in this life. But there is one test that is greater and more important than all of the others. No one can avoid this test, it isn't graded on a curve, and there is no way to cheat. This test has to do with the only thing you can't afford to lose. And Jesus says that there is only one way that you won't lose it.

So, what is the one thing that you can't afford to lose? Jesus tells you in vs.36. It is your soul. When the text says "world" that Greek word is "*kosmos*", which means the universe. And so, all of your striving to achieve, gain, conquer, and possess what you want is of little consequence in the end if it costs you your soul. All the recognition, adulation, prestige, power, and popularity anyone could ever have, these are no match for the value of your soul. What good would it do to possess the entire universe if you lose your own soul? Jesus says it would do you no good at all. Your soul is worth more than the entire universe combined. It's the one thing you can't afford to lose.

Now, let's discover the only way you won't lose this gift. Jesus tells you something about it in vs.37. He says there is nothing that you can give in exchange for your soul, that all of everything isn't worth as much as your soul. His answer looks back to vs.34-35. The word translated as "life" in vs.35 there is the same Greek word that is translated as "soul" in vs.36-37. The point is that what you need to do with your life in order to save your soul is to give it to God. Instead of fighting for your right to do what you want with the gift of your life, you willingly give your life to God, and in so doing, you give your soul to God for safekeeping. You give it to the one who gave it to you. Like Charlie gave the gobstopper back to Willy Wonka. And won it all.

Your soul is worth more than the universe, which means that YOU are worth more than the universe. This is why people cling to the ownership of their own life. They are proud, and won't listen to Jesus when he says that you

must give your life to him. They think of their own worth more than the worth of God. And that is the root of their problem, loving their gift more than its giver. And so, they fail the test.

Jesus says that you are indeed worth more than the whole universe, because you have a soul. But that is a gift that has been given to you, and the humble know that there is only one way to keep your soul, and that is to give Jesus your life. That is the difference between pride and humility. And that is the difference between damnation and salvation.

You have been given a gift that is greater than the universe. And this life is the test of what you will do with your soul. You will either trade it away for something worth far less than it. Or you will give it to the only One who can keep it safe, the One who created it. And while your soul is worth more than the whole universe, God is worth more than your soul. So, give your soul for something even greater, something even more valuable, and that is God.

You see, the truth is that you have been given two gifts; one is temporal, and one is eternal. You have been given both the gift of your life and the gift of your soul. The gift of your soul is worth much more than the gift of your life. But the world and the devil try and convince you that the gift of your life is more important. Jesus says it is the other way around. What you do with your soul depends on what you do with your life. If you try and keep ultimate control of your life, you will lose your soul. But if you let Jesus have the control of your life, he will save your soul. Everyone dies eventually; they lose their life at some point. And everyone will live forever, someplace. So, will you cling to something that you will eventually lose anyway? Or will you let go of it and keep the one thing you cannot afford to lose?

Jesus is saying that if you want to save your soul you must give him your life. The tradeoff is more than worth it, no matter what you may have to go through because your soul is more valuable than your life. This life cannot compare to eternal life. But Jesus wants you to realize that the cost in this life

is not only worth it because of eternal life, it is worth it because of what you will receive in this life, even with the persecution, problems, and pain.

Look in vs.35, where Jesus says *whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it*. Now turn to Mark 10:28-30. The call of the gospel is to walk away from doing things your way. You now belong to Jesus. You deny yourself the right to your own way, your own truth, and your own life. And you take up your cross, identifying with Jesus and suffering certain things for his sake. And you follow him, and never look back at what you might be missing out on, because you know it isn't worth what you will gain, which is the salvation of your soul.

But notice that Jesus says that you not only receive the salvation of your soul, you will receive multiplied benefits in this life. What does Jesus mean that those who may lose their safety, their family, or jobs or possessions for his sake will receive multiplied more in this life? How can this be? Has anyone actually experienced this, or even seen this happen? Yes, many people have.

I can confidently say that because of this text. One thing that Jesus is saying here is that those who leave everything behind will be enveloped into a family – the Church. He is saying that the benefits of the Christian family, your brothers and sisters in Christ, far outweigh the cost of submission to Christ. We can share each other's burdens, and joys. And collectively, lovingly, we can help each other, with mercy, and by grace, in the direction of Christlikeness.

In this life, we may have to face being beaten, burdened, bare, broke, and broken, but together, we can celebrate Christ's wholeness, and comfort one another, looking for our blessed hope, the return of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who will receive us into eternal glory. Think of all the multiplied, magnified souls of the redeemed, how valuable they are together, and how it gives glory to God.

You are the captain of your life, but you are not the captain of your soul. In that day when you meet your maker, you won't be able to give anything for your soul. You will have either given it to God or wasted it away. And the only way to give your soul to God for eternity is to give him your life right now. And Jesus promises you that it will be more than worth it.

Jesus not only created your soul; he created and sustains the entire universe. And he is greater than all of the souls that he has ever created. And to save your soul, Jesus has given an even greater gift than your soul. He took on a human body so that he might give his own life to save your soul. And when you give him the right to your life you gain something even greater than your soul, you gain Jesus.

If you won't deny yourself now, you have by that very choice denied yourself for eternity. It is your pride that says I reserve the right to my own life. Well, you can do that, and no one can stop you, but you can't save your own soul. Your life isn't worth it. The whole world isn't worth it. Only Jesus is worth it. And it will be eternally worth it to trade your life for your soul, and to gain Jesus in the process.

You have been given two great gifts; your life and your soul. One, your life, you can hold onto or you can give away. The other, your soul, you have now but you can never hold onto it forever, unless God keeps it for you. Your life is valuable and precious, but the only thing that you really cannot afford to lose is your soul, which is even more valuable and precious. And the only way that you won't lose it is to give Jesus your life. Jesus has given the gift of his life so that you can give the gift of your life. Will you give Jesus the one lesser gift so that he will give you the other, greater gift? Or will you selfishly keep the one and lose the other?

Will you save your life but lose your soul? Or will you receive Jesus as Lord and Savior?

That's the ultimate test of your life. The question is, will you pass the test?