



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Do You Really Want to Follow Jesus? (Mark 8:34-9:1)

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Paul Meinsen / PO Box 891, Jefferson City, MO 65102 / paul.meinsen@capitolcom.org

For the interim session, we plan to meet most Wednesdays during the 12noon-1pm lunch hour in House Hearing Room #6. I hope you are able to make many of our studies. We will continue our study in the Gospel of Mark.

March 5, 1836. Colonel William Travis had known for several days that his situation inside the old Spanish mission called the Alamo had become hopeless. Several thousand soldiers under the command of Mexican Gen. Santa Anna had Travis and some 189 other defenders surrounded.

So he gathered his fellow defenders that Saturday afternoon and gave them a speech.

"We must die," he began. "Our business is not to make a fruitless effort to save our lives, but to choose the manner of our death."

He saw three possibilities: Surrender and face execution; trying to fight their way out only to be "butchered" by Mexican lancers; or "remain in this fort, resist every assault, and to sell our lives as dearly as possible."

Then, Travis drew his sword and slowly marked a line in the dirt. "I now want every man who is determined to stay here and die with me to come across this line."

Only a French soldier of fortune remained behind.¹

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Jesus cast out a demon from a man in the synagogue and healed Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1, the crowds have been relentlessly following Him. A couple of times He tried to get away but they followed. Other times He told people not to tell others about the miracle He just performed, but they did not remain quiet and the crowds kept coming. And Jesus in His compassion for "sheep without a shepherd" continued to minister to them in miraculous ways.

Then in a time alone with His disciples, He asked them who they thought He was and Peter replied, "You are the Christ." He was the one that the

people of Israel had been told will come and they had been waiting for through the years.

Jesus then told them of His upcoming necessary rejection, crucifixion and resurrection. Peter, who just stated that Jesus is the Christ, rebuked the Christ for saying these things because they did not follow their ideas of a majestic ruler who will reestablish the kingdom of Israel to grand peace and prosperity.

Jesus, not so gently, then rebuked Peter. He called Peter 'Satan' and commanded him to get behind Him. For Peter was not thinking about the things that interest God but rather the things which interest man.

Jesus continued this thought by explaining further the things that interest God. It is not simply big crowds that interest Him; but rather true, faithful, committed, "to-the-death" followers.

Mark 8:34-9:1 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Today, we are just going to walk through this profound and challenging passage. Jesus has drawn a line in the sand, and no one has erased that line—it is still there today.

THE PRINCIPLE FOR TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (8:34)

Jesus gathers His disciples and brings in the crowd who must have been standing within earshot of Jesus. He says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me..." This had to capture everyone's attention. They had an idea of His "messiahship". They knew about the miracles, the feedings, the healings, the

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raising from the dead; that is why they are there. In their eager anticipation to hear what His plan was going to be, they stepped in. The size of the crowd is unknown. No doubt that it began to shrink as Jesus laid out three aspects of what it means to truly follow Him (the easy part of this study is defining these things--the hard part is doing them).

The first thing Jesus said as He drew His "line in the sand" was that a person is to "deny himself". To deny oneself is to renounce self--"to cease to make self the object of one's life and actions."²² In other words, the self is no longer on the throne of a person's life; something or someone else is the new center.

It is more than just turning down things in life that one may want, it is the turning of one's back on the things which someone may rely upon. It is the setting aside of one's accomplishments, one's glory, one's ambitions, one's desires for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.

Two examples in Scripture can be used to illustrate this teaching. The first is when a "rich young ruler" came to Jesus to ask what he needed to do to have eternal life (Mark 10:17-22). Jesus told him to obey the commandments and the young man said that he had done all those things. Then Jesus told him to "go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Mark 10:21). In essence, "deny yourself of all that you have, have done and are, and come along."

Jesus wasn't saying that he could earn his salvation by giving all his stuff to the poor and take a vow of poverty. No, Jesus knew that this man was the center of his own life. So Jesus just peeled back the façade of "religion" to expose his self-centered heart.

A second example comes from the Apostle Paul whose resume would have shamed this rich young ruler. He wrote the following while sitting in chains in Rome:

Philippians 3:4-8 "...although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have

counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ..."

The rich young ruler wanted his materials, prestige, honor AND his eternal life, too. Paul gave up all for the sake of Christ and the life He promised. One went away sad; the other gained much joy and value in knowing and following Jesus.

The second thing Jesus told this crowd who was following Him was to "take up his cross". This had to be a shocking statement to the ears of the disciples and the crowd. No doubt all had seen a Roman crucifixion for Rome did not carry out capital punishment in the backrooms of a prison, but along the main roads leading up to a town. When Rome forced someone to pick up his cross, it was for one purpose--taking it to the location where he would die. Jesus is truly painting a picture of a condemned man on his way to his death.

THE ROMAN GOVERNOR URGED THE OLD CHRISTIAN PASTOR POLYCARP SAYING, "SWEAR, AND I WILL RELEASE THEE--REPROACH CHRIST." POLYCARP ANSWERED, "EIGHTY AND SIX YEARS HAVE I SERVED HIM, AND HE NEVER ONCE WRONGED ME; HOW THEN SHALL I BLASPHEME MY KING, WHO HATH SAVED ME?"

If one wants to follow Jesus, one must "be willing to pay any price for Christ's sake. It is the willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom for His sake."²³ Not all will be killed for following Jesus, but He wants those who are willing to endure death if called upon to do so.

Friend, this is much more than enduring a hardship or trial. It is demeaning to Christ when we say "We all have our cross to bear" when referencing a cantankerous spouse, tough job or enduring crabby people. The cross Jesus instructed His followers to pick up is one that leads to death. His cross led to His death; therefore, His followers must be willing to follow in the same manner if need be.

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As Jesus laid out the principles of following Him, His third comment is simply to “follow Me.” To “follow Jesus” is a call to walk in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21), to obey Him (John 15:16), to believe and trust Him (John 3:16) and to love Him because Christ first loved and sacrificed for people (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

In these aspects of the principle of discipleship, Jesus is not prescribing a legalistic, works based salvation where you just check off these three things and you are in. He is not dismissing the sovereignty of God in salvation, either. He is instructing the half-hearted, “false-fronted” followers what a true follower, a true person of faith, called by God looks like.

Martin Luther tried to renounce self and master obedience in his life in a monastery. But it was not until he understood that the just shall live by faith that he became a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Following the command to take up the cross and follow Him, Jesus continued this line of thought with the reason why.

THE ARGUMENT FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (8:35-37)

Jesus illustrated the concept of denying, taking up the cross and following with the paradox, “If you try to save it, you will lose it; but if you lose it for My sake, you will save it.”

Starting in verse 35, Jesus uses the word ψυχή (*psuche*, which is translated “life/soul”) four times in the next three verses. This word includes the totality of a person of what we may call the “heart, soul/spirit, mind”. It is more than just the physical body (which our society is consumed with), it is the “personhood” or “being” which one has. It is that which will be reunited with the physical body in the resurrection and will live eternally in heaven or hell. It is what Jesus warned about when he said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:25).

Therefore, the one who desires to save his total person (that is in his own luxuries, power, wisdom and abilities) will not save it; but he who loses his total person for the sake of CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL (this implies that one is a believer, trusting in Christ for His salvation) will not lose it.

What an incredible promise!! For eleven (out of the 12) of Jesus’ disciples who heard this statement would eventually “lose their lives” for the sake of the gospel. The one who “saved his life” by turning Jesus in to the authorities lost it, as he hung himself in despair.

Jesus follows this paradoxical statement with two rapid-fire hard hitting rhetorical questions:

#1 *What profits a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul?* (v36)

In other words, what profit gain is there if you temporarily have the whole world in your hands only to have eternally lost your total life in punishment?

This was the foolishness of the decision of the rich young ruler.

#2 *What would a man give for his soul?* (v37)

The obvious answer is that nothing on earth is worth giving up our eternal soul, but everyday people make this foolish exchange. They swap their soul for another dollar, another position, another escape from reality, more prestige, more power, more...

"HE IS NO FOOL WHO GIVES WHAT HE CANNOT KEEP TO GAIN THAT WHICH HE CANNOT LOSE." --JIM ELLIOT

Jesus did not stop here with His sermon. He told the people that those who want to follow Him must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow. He told them why: It is foolish to eternally give up your total person for temporary gain (no matter how big those gains may be). Next, He gave a grave warning.

A WARNING CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (8:38)

His warning is quite simply to those who are contemplating following Him: If you are ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of you.

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Jesus called the generation they were living in “unfaithful and sinful.” He had already made this assessment when He said earlier that “Their lips honor me, but they are hypocrites” (Mark 7:6). Therefore, if one was embarrassed of Jesus and “His words”—which in essence is another way of saying “the gospel” (basically stating again what He said in verse 35) when these perverse people put the pressure on you, then Jesus will be embarrassed of you when I return in glory.

In other words, the “ashamed ones” will be like the ones who thought they were doing great things for God only to hear Jesus say “Depart from me for I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

In a negative sense, Jesus is recapping all that He just taught. The one embarrassed of Jesus is showing that he has not denied himself, taken up his cross and followed. That person is more concerned with his own well-being, reputation, honor, pride and life than he is in following Jesus. He is attempting to temporarily save his own life, all the while sacrificing his eternal soul. That person is the fool who has exchanged his soul for the things of this world.

By this time the people listening, including the 12 disciples, had to be thinking, “What what are we getting into? We have to turn our backs on all that we have been doing and be willing to go to the death for you. And if we don’t, we will lose our souls and you will turn you back on us. AND all this right after you told us that you yourself are going to die. I had better sit down.” But before they get to the point of absolute despair, Jesus follows His tough teaching with a great promise for those who will follow Him.

A PROMISE CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (9:1)

With all the talk about death and the cross, Jesus compassionately gave a promise to those whom He was talking.

“Truly I say to you” were words showing the authority of Christ Himself. If Jesus was a mere man, these words would be worthless, powerless. But as already stated, Jesus was not a mere man, but “The Son of God”; a Son with all rights and authority of the Sovereign of the Universe.

In His authority, Jesus promised that before some taste death (possibly a martyrs’ death) some there will see the Kingdom of God come with power (Matthew 16:28—“see the Son of Man coming in His Kindgom”).

Much ink has been used to discuss Jesus’ meaning. Various interpretations include Jesus talking about His resurrection and ascension, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, the spread of Christianity or Jesus’ second coming. All of these positions have problematic issues.

It seems, though, that the best understanding is that Jesus’ was talking about His own transfiguration that will take place less than a week after this statement (Mark 9:2-13). None tasted death before this glorious event and it was observed only by “some”— Peter, James and John.

This promise and its fulfillment was a tremendous encouragement to the disciples as they pondered on the strong words from Jesus. If they were going to give up all, including possible their own lives, they had to be fully convinced that Jesus was worth following. The glorious meeting with Elijah and Moses would have brought this great hope; even though it was not fully understood by those who saw it.

But what about those today who deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Jesus? What about those who have and will give up their lives for the sake of the gospel? What about those who are not ashamed of Jesus? Are there any remaining promises for those who lived after the transfiguration event?

Look to these passages:

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Revelation 6:9-11 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony

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which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

The One who promised and fulfilled the promise back then has made promises to those who follow Him today. These promises are for those who do not lose their life eternal, even though they may have lost their life temporal.

CONCLUSION

So, do you really want to be a follower of Jesus? He's laid out the requirements, the reasons, a warning and a great promise—what say you? He has issued a call for people to come and be willing to die for Him—what say you? Ultimately, we don't know what we would do or say if that choice was thrust upon us; and we don't know if we will be called upon by God to make that choice. But Jesus Christ wants followers who, with the power of the Holy Spirit and for the glory of Jesus' name, will be willing to follow Him all the way, even to the death.⁴

Nichomachus, who was brought before the Roman governor as a Christian, was ordered to sacrifice to the pagan idols.

Nichomachus replied, "I cannot pay that respect to devils, which is only due to the Almighty."

This speech so much enraged the proconsul that Nichomachus was put to the rack. After enduring the torments for a time, he recanted; but scarcely had he given this proof of his frailty, than he fell into the greatest agonies, dropped down on the ground, and expired immediately.

Denisa, a young woman of only sixteen years of age, who beheld this terrible judgment, suddenly exclaimed, "O unhappy wretch, why would you buy a moment's ease at the expense of a miserable eternity!" Optimus, hearing this, called to her, and Denisa avowing

herself to be a Christian, she was beheaded, by his order, soon after (*Foxe's Book of Martyrs*).

God can forgive your sins, are you interested?

¹ www.texasescapes.com/MikeCoxTexasTales/Line-in-the-Sand-Alamo-History.htm. It is still debated about whether this is a big Texas legend or the truth. Either way, it vividly describes what Jesus is teaching in this passage.

² Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 8:697.

³ John F. MacArthur, *Matthew 8-15*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987),

⁴Every true Texan knows what happened on March 6, 1836. Santa Anna's forces breached the walls of the Alamo and killed every Texas combatant.