

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for May 7, 2017

Following Christ
Mark 8:34-38

I. The requirements (8:34)

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.

- Jesus invites more than just the 12 to hear this teaching
 - Message is for followers, seekers, and the confused – everyone
 - Just made His identity and mission known to disciples
 - Now everyone would know what He demanded
 - Jesus is teaching the masses again, this time without parables or lack of clarity
- There are two clear requirements for following Jesus in verse 34

A. Denial of self

- “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself...”
- Following Jesus demands self-denial
- Following Jesus requires saying no to every other passion or pursuit
 - You do not live for money
 - You do not live for people
 - You do not live for retirement
 - You do not live for Friday and weekend
 - You do not live for vacation
 - You do not live for family
- There can be no competing desires, passions, or goals when it comes to following Jesus
- How can one identify a competing desire, passion or goal?
 - Ask yourself, if this was removed from my life, how would I respond?
 - If this friendship, relationship, car, house, money, retirement, ability, etc. was taken from me, how would I respond?

B. Devotion unto sacrifice

- “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

- Following Jesus contains expectation of death
- Cross to them was not as it appears today to us
 - Today the cross is associated with jewelry or a good luck charm
- For them, it was a symbol of death
- There was no confusion of what “take up his cross” meant
- It is worth comparing this statement with a modern equivalent
 - Let him deny himself and enter the gas chamber
 - Let him deny himself and sit in the electric chair
- “Prior to the Romans, the Persians, Greeks, and others practiced crucifixion as a means of exposing an executed corpse to shame and humiliation. The Romans perfected the method, and it became for them a favorite method of execution for the worst of criminals and the greatest of enemies. The goal was to produce both maximum torture and humiliation. Crucifixion was also meant as a weapon of terror, to warn any would-be revolutionaries of the consequences of opposing Rome. Most crucifixion sites were near major roads to make them visible to the populace and passing travelers. Generally, the upright stake was left at the place of execution while the crossbeam was carried by the victim. The victim would then be tied or nailed to the cross and allowed to slowly die from exposure, festering wounds, and asphyxiation. Death on a cross could take many days. The body would often be left as carrion for birds or dogs, which increased the shame, since an honorable death required burial in one’s ancestral tomb.” (Strauss, 373)
- Following Jesus demands all of us
 - Romans 12:1 “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”
 - Acts 20:24 “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”
 - Martyred saints of revelation did not love even their own lives even unto death (Revelation 12:11)

II. The reality (8:35)

35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

A. Save your life now

- “For whoever would save his life will lose it”

-Some would hear Jesus’ previous statement and decline the offer to take up their cross

-A foolproof way to determine someone’s conviction on any given topic is to ask, How much are they willing to sacrifice for their beliefs?

-Reality is saving your own skin in this life has a costly price in the next life

B. Save your life later

- “but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

-Play on words Mark 8:35 “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”

-Best understood as two time related options

-Save your life now and lose it in the end

-Lose your life now and save it in the end

-Notice the reason for losing one’s life - “for my sake and the gospel’s”

-All of the Apostles did lose their life for Christ’s sake and the gospel

-No sacrifice is too great when one has true belief in Christ and the good news

- “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.” -C.T. Studd

- “If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a Heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?”

-David Livingstone

- “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” -Jim Elliot

-Must we all lose our lives in overseas missionary service unto Christ?

-No, but our mindset must be as equally tenacious

-Either you are living to preserve and save your life now OR you are living to lose your life now for Christ and the gospel

-What is the outcome for those who preserve and save their life now?

III. The risk (8:36-37)

36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?

- In order to show the folly of preserving/saving one's life in the here and now, Jesus paints a picture in the form of a hypothetical scenario
- Jesus gives this man the full benefit of the doubt
 - This man has chosen to save his own life
 - From appearance, this man has done quite well
- Jesus describes this mystery man as one who was able "to gain the whole world"
 - He has all the money
 - He has all the prestige and prominence
 - He has all the power
 - He has played his cards just right in this life
 - All who consider his life are envious
- What good is such a status when encountering God in eternity???
 - Assume this man could actually reason with God
 - Is there any way he could reason with God regarding his soul's eternal outcome?
 - Imagine the conversation!
 - Man- "Lord, I give you my earthly bank statement and financial portfolio"
 - Lord- "I already own all that and I was actually the One that made it available to you. Unfortunately, it appears that you have failed to store up any heavenly treasure."
 - Man- "But Lord, consider my charitable donations. I gave away more than any other on the planet!"
 - Lord- "Sure, those were kind gestures, but you fail to realize that you were not doing that giving for me. It merely garnered you more support and prestige among men."
 - Man- "Speaking of prestige Lord, consider all my contacts and relationships on earth. Surely they can vouch for me and my goodwill."
 - Lord- "No doubt you were well known and a friend to many. However, I never knew you."
 - Man- "God, I'm a good person! Accept my lifetime of generosity, kindness and love for my fellow man!"
 - Lord- "This is the difference between us, what you see as good deeds are only filthy rags in my sight. I demand perfection and you have fallen short. You rejected my Son and instead, you worked so hard to save your life on earth and now the time has come for you to forfeit your soul for all eternity."

- King Solomon is another example of one who gained the whole world
 - He had everything (women, wealth, wisdom, respect, etc.)
 - Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
- “For what can a man give in return for his soul?”
 - Even if man could gain the whole world, his valuable riches and possessions could never purchase his soul!
 - Psalm 49:7-9 “Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, 8 for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, 9 that he should live on forever and never see the pit.”

IV. The reckoning (8:38)

38 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."

- Being ashamed of Jesus is failing to identify with Him
 - Jews viewed Jesus as a stumbling block
 - Greeks viewed Jesus and gospel as folly
- Failing to identify with Christ is participation in this adulterous and sinful generation
 - There is no neutral position to take when it comes to Christ
- To be ashamed of Jesus now means He will be ashamed of You when He returns
 - This does not mean Jesus will simply ignore you when He returns
 - This does not mean Jesus will appreciate others a little more than you
 - This means that Jesus will reject you as you have rejected Him