

Mark 8:34–9:1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 August 2026

Preacher: Joe Pace

[0:00] 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 to gain 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 angels.

And he said to them, Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Thank you. Thank you, Moses.

[1:08] Well, good morning to everyone this morning. It's good to see each and every one of you. Welcome to Christ Church Chicago.

And we continue in our series of Mark following Jesus. I have a general question for you. Anyone here ever play chess?

It's a great game. I used to play. Not so much now. But one of the most memorable lessons I learned was when I was first trying to play the game.

And I ended up playing against someone who actually knew how to play the game. I thought I was pretty smart. I knew how all the pieces moved.

I had a plan. My strategy was simple. Protect my best pieces. Never lose the queen. Never give away anything valuable.

[2:18] Then I started playing the game with this guy. And he kept doing something that didn't make any sense to me. He would intentionally give up pieces.

I'm thinking, this is great. This guy doesn't have a clue how to play this game.

I then happily take the piece he offered. Thank you very much. And remove it from the board. Then, just five moves later, I heard him say, checkmate.

Which, if you don't know the game, means you have no more moves to make and the game is over.

I looked down at the board in disbelief. Surely, he didn't just say, checkmate.

Then it hit me. I realized he wasn't losing by giving up pieces. He was intentionally sacrificing.

[3:35] Every piece he gave up was positioning him for ultimate victory. You can say amen. That's when I learned something valuable that has stayed with me ever since.

Sometimes, the move that looks like losing is actually the move that wins the game. Most of us have spent our lives trying not to lose.

We don't want to lose money, lose respect, lose influence, lose comfort, lose control. But Jesus walks into our text this morning and essentially says, everything you've been taught about winning is backwards.

In God's kingdom, it's often sacrifice that succeeds. Here it is, church.

This is my thought for the text this morning. Jesus is saying, if you want to be on my team, if you want to be my disciple, if you're going to follow me, then you're going to have to let me teach you how to win by losing.

[4:49] That's my thought for the text. How to win by losing. As the passage opens, Jesus calls the crowd and the disciples together and begins to teach them basically two lessons about discipleship and what it takes to be on his team and win.

First, verse 34, he explains what you're going to have to lose in order to win. And then he spends the rest of the passage explaining why it's worth losing it.

What you're going to have to lose to win. He hits them hard right out of the gate. All in verse 34, if you want to be on team Jesus, you're going to have to do three things right up front.

Three imperatives. You're going to have to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Lord Jesus. The poor disciples had just learned, come to grips with the fact that Jesus would suffer, be rejected, and die on a cross.

Now, Jesus was telling them that they were going to have to do the same thing. That first imperative is the denial of self.

[6:14] Don't misunderstand. Jesus never says, think less of yourself. He simply says, think of yourself less.

Denying yourself means giving up ownership of your life. Like when you sell a car or house, you get the payment, you sign the papers, and you hand the keys over.

Following Jesus means handing the keys of our lives over to him who bought us. It involves sacrificing one's own interest in favor of serving Christ.

Jesus says, if you want to come after me, you must give up your right to your own identity, your own sense of morality, your own desires, and submit yourself to me.

This means, church, you can't give Jesus the keys to the house, but still have a separate lock on one of the rooms.

[7:25] I tried that growing up, and my daddy took the door off the hinges. You can't treat Jesus like a consultant.

We'd love to get your opinion about this, Jesus, and then we'll get right back to you and let you know what we've decided. No, Jesus is not looking to be your consultant.

He's looking for you to acknowledge him as your Savior and your Lord. The only way you're going to be the disciple God is calling you to be is to deny you and submit to him, saying, Not my will, O Lord, but yours.

Hear me, church. Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, usually for a good purpose, we occasionally give up some things or activities.

You know, for the next 30 days, no more hostess chocolate cupcakes with the creamy vanilla filling and the white squiggle on the top.

[8:52] No, that's not it. When we deny ourselves, we surrender ourselves to Christ. And we determine to obey exclusively only his will.

Jesus then says the second imperative, take up or carry your cross. Many people interpret the cross to be taken up as merely some burden or irritation they must carry in their lives.

And some of that may be true. The phrase, we all have our crosses to bear, is casually applied to a variety of difficulties, describing situations like temptations, long-term sickness, difficult coworkers on a thankless job, or maybe a strained relationship.

The problem is that we as believers can tend to interpret any unpleasantness as a cross. And then overly spiritualize it as the cost of discipleship.

However, Brother Ben, if we're going to get our historical context straight. When a person carried a cross in Jesus' day, no one thought of it as a persistent annoyance or symbolic burden.

[10:18] No one thought of it as a piece of jewelry around one's neck or a church decoration. To the person in the first century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only.

Death. Death. Later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace, and love, and rightfully so.

But in Jesus' day, the cross represented a torturous death. Understanding that context, Jesus' command to take up your cross carries so much more weight and a much deeper connotation.

This is a call to self-abasement and self-sacrifice. One must be willing to die in order to follow Jesus.

Dying to self is an absolute surrender to God. And it is, in essence, the ultimate end of you.

[11:55] And who you think you are. It's death to self itself.

Look, some things, church, you just have to kill. You can cut the weeds in your yard or you can kill them.

Cut weeds, eventually grow back. Don't have time to run that sermon down. It's a sermon in and of itself. Young people here, you can take a break from what you know is a bad relationship.

I think we just need some space. Or you can kill it. Hey, you know this isn't going to work out and we're just going to have to stop seeing each other.

I grew up in the church. We had a church mother. Mother Coleman was her name. And we thought Mother Coleman had an absolute direct line to Jesus Christ himself.

[13:12] Because whatever she prayed, just, and I remember as a teenager, I was interested in this young lady way, way, way before you, sweetheart. I was interested in this young lady and I took her and she met Mother Coleman.

I took her to church. And she met Mother Coleman and Mother Coleman said, no, this, I don't like this. I'm going to pray that God tears this up.

I looked at the young lady and I said, well, looks like we're going to have to just be friends.

Because there's no hope for this relationship. If Mother Coleman says she's going to pray that it gets torn up. Some things you just have to kill. Death to self is a necessary part of discipleship. But let me warn you here. Death to self isn't a one-time funeral. It's a daily execution. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians, I die daily.

[14:27] The old self has a way of trying to climb back out of the grave. So every morning we got to kill it all over again.

Deny yourself. Pick up your cross. And now, still packed in verse 34, Jesus simply says, follow me. Imitate me. Be just like me. Be my disciple. Walk this out. Go the distance every day for the rest of your days. Being a Christian isn't just about what you say you believe.

It's about who you follow. If it's true that a person is known by the company they keep, then it should be easy to tell who we're following. There's something about the way we walk.

About the way we talk. About the jokes we don't find funny anymore. The way we handle our business and care for others that says we are followers of Christ.

[15:28] Following Jesus isn't merely a Sunday decision. It's a daily devotion. It's a lifetime of walking in his footsteps. Every day you wake up.

Every decision you make. Every crossroad you face. It's choosing his way over your way. His will over your will. The lyrics to the classic hymn say it best here.

Where he leads me, I will follow. I'll go with him all the way. Jesus lays it out clearly in this verse. It's going to cost you something to follow me. You're going to have to suffer some things. You're going to lose some things. This is what I love about the gospel.

Jesus doesn't just leave us with suffering and loss. He says, I know it sounds difficult, and it is, but let me now show you how you actually win by losing and why it's all worth it.

[16:34] You'll notice in each of the next four verses, verses 35 to 38, they all begin with the preposition for. Meaning, these verses are about to give the reasoning, the grounds, the justification for the imperatives just laid out in verse 34.

Jesus says, here's why you should take up your cross and follow me. Let me give you just a few reasons. First, it will save your life.

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. This is one of the greatest paradoxes in all of scripture.

Jesus isn't primarily talking about physical survival. He's talking about the direction and purpose of your life. The person who spends life protecting self, promoting self, preserving self, above all else, will ultimately lose everything that they were trying to keep.

But the one who gladly surrenders his life to Christ, who places Jesus above comfort, ambition, security, and even life itself, will discover what real life is all about.

[17:57] God's kingdom turns the world's values upside down. The world says, hold on tightly to your life. Jesus says, open your hands and let it go.

The world says, live for yourself. Jesus says, live for me. The world says, winning means getting the most out of life. Jesus says, winning begins with surrendering your life.

Jesus now goes further in his explanation of why it's worth it by secondly pressing his listeners, indeed all of us this morning, to count the cost.

In effect, he's saying, before you reject my call to discipleship because you think it's too expensive, sit down and really add everything up.

He starts the calculation by asking two penetrating questions. Verses 36 and 37. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

[19:00] For what can a man give in return for his soul? Jesus here speaks the language of profit, loss, and exchange because every one of us is making investments with our lives.

Every day we are trading our time, our energy, our ambitions, and our devotion for something we believe is valuable. So Jesus says, okay, let's do the math.

Add up everything this world can offer. Wealth, success, power, popularity, possessions, even if you could somehow gain the entire world.

Now take all of that and subtract from that your soul. What's the answer? What's left?

I'll tell you, it's a debt that can never be repaid. It's an eternal loss that no earthly profit could ever cover.

[20:06] I'm not a world-class banker like Brother Hensel, but to me, that's the worst trade in human history.

Yes, there are incredible earthly possessions to have, but there is no earthly good so great that the gospel can't give you better.

You can recover from financial loss. You can rebuild a career. You can replace a house. Even earn back a reputation.

But once your life is over, there's nothing you can offer in exchange for your priceless soul. Jesus isn't discouraging us from counting the cost of following him.

He's insisting that we also count the infinitely greater cost of refusing him. This is a great spot right here for me to ask.

[21:06] If you don't know Jesus as your personal savior, I encourage you to count the cost and follow Christ. You don't need to get yourself cleaned up before following him.

Jesus is already taking care of the sin. If you come, just come as you are. I'd love to talk to you about that after service. Because when you do the math God's way, you'll discover that losing the world for Christ is not really losing at all.

It actually is the only way to win. Now, Jesus isn't quite finished making his case. He's already told us that following him leads to real life.

He's already challenged us to do the math and recognize that no earthly gain is worth an eternal loss. But now he gives one final sobering reason why it's worth following him.

He shifts our attention from today's decisions to tomorrow's judgment. From the approval of this generation to the verdict of eternity.

[22:11] Jesus reminds us that every disciple must ultimately answer one question. Whose approval really matters the most?

Jesus says, verse 38, for whoever is ashamed of me and my words and this adulterous and sinful generation of him, will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his father with his holy angels.

Being ashamed of Jesus doesn't simply mean feeling embarrassed to pray over your meal in a restaurant.

Though, I used to hate sometimes going out to eat as a family with my dad because what was supposed to just be grace over the meal would turn into full-blown prayer meeting.

Yeah, a real potluck in prayer. He would not only pray for the food we were about to receive, but he'd also pray for the restaurant we were in.

[23:19] Lord, bless Red Lobster. He'd also pray for the food we were in. He would pray for the food we were in. And then on top, he would pray for everyone gathered there for dinner that they may have a glorious time in the Lord eating their meal.

And all I wanted was for the earth to open up and swallow me whole. But in this context, that's not merely what Jesus is talking about.

No, here it means refusing to identify with Christ because you're more concerned about the acceptance of the world than the approval of the Savior.

Remember the setting. Jesus has just announced that he's going to suffer, be rejected, and die. Following him won't be popular. It'll cost something.

And Jesus says, every person must choose. Will you stand with me even if the world stands against you? Tragedy is that many people spend their entire lives chasing the applause of people whose opinions won't matter five minutes after they die.

[24:33] While neglecting the approval of the one whose verdict will matter forever. Jesus isn't threatening his followers so much as revealing an eternal reality.

The way we respond to him now reveals our true allegiance. If we're unwilling to acknowledge him before the world, this adulterous and sinful generation, the text says, we should not expect him to

acknowledge us before his father.

In other words, don't trade eternal acceptance for temporary applause. Don't lose Christ in order to keep the crowd.

In the kingdom of God, you win by losing the world's approval if it means gaining Christ's approval. Jesus is saying, if you won't ride with me now, don't expect to reign with me later.

Reign with me. Reign with me. That's how Jesus, Brother Charlie, closes and makes the final of his closing argument.

[25 : 55] Lest his disciples think following him only leads to suffering, Jesus concludes chapter 9, verse 1 with a promise. The cross is not the end of the story.

The kingdom is coming. Glory is coming. The one who is rejected today will one day return with power.

That's why it's always worth following Jesus because in the end, those who lose for him will reign with him and be rewarded for their faithfulness.

Lord, help me. Romans chapter 8, Paul says, the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

[26 : 51] This church is the wonderful paradox of Christianity. We're asked to lay down our identity only to find we're gaining an identity much more precious.

We're asked to sacrifice our desires only to find that they don't even compare to what has already been prepared for us. We're asked to lay down these temporary lies only to find in the end we're going to live forever.

I hear you saying, Pastor Pace, that all sounds great. But it's so much easier said than done. In fact, there are times where it sounds outright impossible.

I get it. Everything in us wants to hold on. Everything in us wants to protect ourselves, preserve ourselves, promote ourselves.

But often we want the promotion without the pain. We want the victory without the sacrifice. If only there was an example.

[28 : 08] If only there was some model we could follow and pattern ourselves after. If only, wait, there is an example.

Lord help me. It's called the good news of the gospel. Everything Jesus asked us to do, he's already done.

Lord, you all have. Pastor Helm, if I could say it the way my daddy would. Nearly 2,000 years ago on a hill called Calvary, the world watched what looked like the worst move anyone could ever make.

They watched Jesus willingly surrender himself, give himself into the hands of sinful men. He allowed himself to be mocked, to be beaten, to be nailed to a cross.

And if you'd been standing there that Friday afternoon, you might have thought the same thing. This guy is losing. The religious leaders thought he lost. Rome thought he lost.

[29 : 14] The crowds thought he lost. Satan thought he lost. They looked at the move and thought that just cost him the game. But just like I did in the opening of this message playing chess, they misunderstood the move.

Lord help me. It wasn't defeat at all. It was an intentional sacrifice. Because remember what I told you in the beginning, sometimes the move that looks like losing is actually the move that wins the game.

While they thought they were taking his life, he was laying it down. While they thought they were ending his mission, he was actually accomplishing his mission.

Because, Brother Hackley, the preachers would say where I grew up, early. Y'all don't. Early. Sunday morning.

God made his next move. The stone was rolled away. Death was defeated. Sin was conquered. The grave was emptied. Jesus got up with all power in his hands.

[30 : 23] Checkmate. Checkmate. Checkmate. Church, he won because he was willing to lose.

And because he lost his life, you and I can find ours. Because he carried his cross, we can carry ours. Because he was not ashamed of us, we don't have to be ashamed of him.

So don't be afraid to follow Jesus. He's already led the way. In the kingdom of God, the way to live is to die. The way to rise is to bow.

The way to wear the crown is to first carry the cross. Church, that's the heartbeat of the gospel.

That's the call to discipleship.

And that's the way to win by losing. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for what you've already done for us.

[31 : 28] Thank you for the example that you said. May we, with courage and boldness, be willing to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you.

For we know that whatever we gain in this world is fleeting and temporary. But with you, we have access to eternal life.

And we'll live together. Thank you, Father, for showing us how to win by losing. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen.