

Discipleship

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Let's go to the Word of God, Mark chapter 8. Mark chapter 8, if you've got your Bibles. looking at the subject of discipleship. Discipleship. The Lord calls us to be his disciples. Mark chapter 8.

Disciple. What does it mean? A disciple means a learner. It means we sit at his feet. We learn of him. It means one who comes to be taught, to learn of him. In the Bible context, we learn at his feet, as his disciples, the Lord Jesus.

And in God's Word, it tells us that the disciples were those who devoted themselves to the times of prayer, of worship, of gathering, of loving one another, of giving, of evangelising.

They got together as God's own people, as learners of God. And this group of men and women, through the Word, they refused to keep the truth to themselves.

They couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to tell others and make disciples. Make others disciples. And the Lord still is looking for disciples. He's wanting us to be such.

[1 : 13] He desires us to be his disciples today. He calls us to that. Ordinary people, just like you and me, people, average garden variety, common people, are still called, just like our Lord called such in his time on the earth.

He's still calling such to himself today. And we see that in Mark 8, 34. Mark 8, from verse 34. We're going to read 34 through to the close of the chapter there.

Mark 8, 34. And when he, the Lord Jesus, had called the people unto him, with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels the same shall save it.

For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

[2 : 32] Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his father with the holy angels.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word as we open it together tonight. Lord, lead me, use me, speak your words through me, Lord, that you would be the one seen and heard and loved tonight, that we might know you better and more dearly, love you and follow you more closely.

Lord, help us to be such as you are calling still today disciples. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. It's been said that salvation is free.

But discipleship will cost everything that you have. Because we know we're saved by faith through God's grace.

It's a gift freely given. He grants us eternal life as we trust him. And then there's that process of sanctification that was referred to in the prayer time.

[3 : 48] As we walk with God, we grow closer, we grow stronger, we follow after him. And it's that discipleship that happens.

And consider firstly the commitment to discipleship, the call to commitment to being his disciples.

Now there's a story once about a pig and a chicken were walking past a church.

I'm sure it's a very factual story here. There's pig and the chicken. And of course they were talking to each other as well. I don't know whether they used chicken language or pig language. But as they were walking past this church, there was a big sign that said, Help us to feed the hungry.

And so the chicken suggested to the pig that maybe they could pitch in and offer them some eggs and bacon. And the pig responded, That's easy for you to say.

Your part requires just a contribution. You know, an egg or two. But for me, it's a life or death commitment. And we're talking about the commitment to being a disciple.

[4 : 51] It's a life or death commitment, isn't it? To be his disciple. It means to lay down a life. It means that we would be such as would deny ourselves that we should lose our life.

Shouldn't we rather be like the pig, as it were, as much as pigs aren't very sanctified creatures. But we should be, as it were, to give our whole, to give ourselves unto God.

That commitment to discipleship. It means total surrender. Total surrender. When our Lord called people to follow him, many in the crowd walked away, didn't they?

Now, John 6, verse 66. It's an easy one to remember. 6, 6, 6. John 6, 66. It says, When he called them, he said that numbers walked away.

You know, it's almost like he wasn't into the mega church business, was he? He called people to commitment. He called people to discipleship. And he was left with just a handful, really, in three years of ministry.

[5 : 56] So, it's almost the same today, isn't it? That we are to be in that number. It might be a small number, but yet, be in that number. That's what matters. In Judges 7, we read about God sending his servant Gideon in a battle against the Midianites.

And people would know the story that the Lord wanted to get all the glory for the battle against the Midianites. And so, through a series of tests, God whittled down Gideon's army from 32,000 to just 300.

It's amazing, isn't it? That you would think, surely, a big force, 32,000, would be a great endeavor to send that many large number of troops into the battle.

But God wanted to get the glory, so he narrowed it down to just 300. Gideon's 300. And God knew that he could do more with the 300 alert and committed men than he could with the 32,000 half-hearted ones.

Rather that we be in the 300 than the 32,000. Amen? Let's be in that number. It's the same with being a disciple, that call, that call to commitment, the commitment of discipleship.

[7 : 13] And our Lord wants to have those who are truly serious as his servants and soldiers. That we would be, as it were, in that alert, fighting fit bunch of volunteers that are ready to march in to battle.

God wants our wholeheartedness. Now, sometimes there's big crowds of people, but God wants those who will be his disciples. God wants our wholeheartedness.

In verse 34 we read, Mark 8, 34, again to repeat, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Notice it says, firstly, let him deny himself. Deny himself. It's got the sense of utterly reject, disown, cast off.

It's got that sense of denial, of self-denial. And he's saying, our Lord is saying to be his disciple, deny yourself. Surrender control.

[8 : 21] Being, as it were, on the altar as a living sacrifice. Lay your life down for his control, for his person and his power.

And deny, it's really very strong words, as I say. It's forsake. It's disown. It's disregard. Now, sometimes we're all about, as we talked this morning about the self, it's a very self-centered kind of world that we're living in.

And yet, our Lord calls us to do the opposite of that, to deny ourself. Now, make sacrifice. Lay our life down. Be his. For his, at his disposal.

For his purposes. At his service. In history, we hear about how Julius Caesar landed on the shores of Britain with his Roman legions.

And Julius Caesar, when he landed there in the middle of the first century BC, he took a bold and decisive step to ensure the success of his military campaign.

[9 : 25] He ordered his men to march to the edge of the cliffs of Dover on the south side of Britain. And he commanded them to look down at the waters below.

And to their amazement, they saw every ship in which they had crossed the English Channel was engulfed in flames. Caesar had deliberately cut off any possibility of retreat.

He cut off any possibility that they would retreat, that they would return to Rome across the Channel. There was no turning back. And since his soldiers were unable to return to the continent, their only real option was to advance, to take Britain to invade.

And so they were committed. They committed themselves wholly and solely to follow Caesar in that endeavor. And they went forth and conquered Britain. It's the same resolve that we should have,

isn't it?

No turning back. No turning back. Throughout his three-year ministry, the Lord Jesus called people to be his disciples, to call them. He called them to commit, to follow him, to be his, to follow.

[10:38] And he says, in effect, you must have the attitude of denying your flesh. Deny yourself. Be willing to give up that which would hinder your walk.

Be willing to deny, to forsake that which would hinder your testimony. A disciple must be willing to give up that self-ownership, if you like.

Because we are no more our own. You are his. You're purchased with a price. You are his. He's purchased you. We are in his ownership, at his bidding, under his command.

And commitment, he calls us to. Commitment. It's a rare commodity these days, isn't it?

Commitment. When we think commitment to Christ.

It means we cling to something. We refuse to let go of it. No matter the cost. There's the sense of it here. That commitment. That precious commitment.

[11:53] And yet, it's so easy to be the opposite of committed. To have that attitude of an easy-breezy, carefree, careless, uncommitted way of living.

Easy to sit in the easy chairs, as it were, with our remotes. It's easy to take that perspective on life, isn't it?

To kick back and take the easy chair. But our Lord calls us to the commitment of discipleship. Deny yourself. That's a big call, isn't it?

But he does say that to us. He calls us to that. Secondly, we see the cost of discipleship. Consider the cost. Count the cost. Have we really calculated the cost of being his, of being a disciple, being a fair dinkum, effective Christian, a growing, advancing Christian, a Christian who says, I love you, Lord, and I'm sold out.

That cost of discipleship. The cost. There was a Christian woman who attended worship at her church every Sunday without fail. But her unbelieving husband didn't like it one bit.

[13:09] And he asked her to stay home. And sometimes he even threatened her. One Sunday morning, the woman got herself ready to services, as usual, and the husband said, you're not going.

You're staying home today. And when she insisted she was going, the husband pulled out a gun, held it to her head and said, where are you going now? And the wife replied, if you pull the trigger, I'm going to heaven.

If you don't, I'm going to church. So, I mean, there's a sense where she was willing to die if necessary, because she had that commitment of discipleship. She was willing to pay the cost of discipleship.

Willing to die if necessary. And it's the kind of faithfulness that the Lord Jesus calls us to. Not supporting an unsubmission of a wife, but, of course, the sense here is the sense of our allegiance to Christ is right up here, isn't it?

We must have that love of Christ that will pay the cost of discipleship. Where will we pay the cost of discipleship? There was an Italian patriot, a soldier, hero figure called Giuseppe Garibaldi, and he devoted his life to uniting Italy.

[14:34] And his greatest victory was the overthrow of the kingdom of Naples. He landed with a volunteer force of men, 1,070 men. And in two weeks, this force took the city of Palermo and overcame an army of 20,000 regulars.

How come? Garibaldi had an incredibly committed volunteer army. And when he would appeal for recruits, he would say this, I offer neither pay nor quarters nor provisions.

I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country with his heart and not with his lips only follow me.

You know, he had that call that was, there was a crystal clear call, a call to commitment, a call to that cost, that anything worthwhile has a price.

You can count on that, can't you? And with Garibaldi, he wanted men in his army who were full on. They were willing to endure hunger, thirst, force marches, even death, if they loved their country.

[15:46] And, you know, we know that today. People sign up for military service because even when they face great danger and peril, and we know those that have served know that that is a reality, that could happen.

Because they love their country, they love to serve such that they're willing to lay down their lives for the freedom, for our liberties as a people.

And, friends, how much more, how greater a cause we have in Christ. You know, there's a scripture that says, is there not a cause? In the sense that we've got something that is a cause.

You know, we hear of, you know, there's various goodwill causes, there's charities doing good works, there's associations doing, we could say, beneficial things.

There's lots of causes we can contribute to and much under their banner. But is there not a cause? There's no greater cause than this, the cause of Christ, the cause of the gospel, the cause of the kingdom of God.

[16 : 51] There's no greater endeavour. There's no greater enterprise we can invest our lives into than this one. And our allegiance to him is greater than some loveful country or freedom.

It's the love of our saviour, of our master, of our Lord, who laid down his life for us. And so we see the cost, the price to pay. You know, there's a big difference between a glass and a diamond.

It's a cost difference, isn't it? Cost differential. There's a big difference between brass and gold. One is valuable, the other is cheap. And we could say that too, of discipleship, that there's a cost here, a very, very heavy cost.

There's a cost involved in being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know some countries, much more so, of course, than the Western world, and yet we see that it's still a cost to calculate and to consider and to say, yes, I'm willing to pay the price.

Are we willing to let the Lord have all of us, all of ourselves? You know, we know General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, at the end of his life he was asked the secret of his amazing Christian life.

[18 : 18] And he said, I told the Lord he can have all that there is of William Booth. It's a good saying, isn't it? It's a good statement. You know, could you say that of yourself?

Let the Lord have all that there is of your name. Let the Lord have all that there is of your name there.

That's the commitment of a disciple, isn't it? The cost of a disciple. To be a disciple, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. Consider the cross of discipleship.

The cross, you know, for us in our days it's a little golden cross where people hang up or put on walls or hang on buildings or walls. But we're not talking about really what some would really kind of look as just a form of artwork or jewellery or some sacred symbol.

The Lord is talking about the cross. What is the cross? It's a rugged, cruel device of torture and punishment and death. And our Lord says, take up your cross.

[19 : 27] He says, take up your cross. In Luke's gospel it's saying, take up your cross daily. Daily. Not just on Sundays or at the appropriate time of the day.

No. Day by day by day. Moment by moment. Day after day. Take up your cross daily. Daily, daily. And when our Lord is talking about a cross, he was talking about what people would see as they would walk down the streets and the cities of the day of Jerusalem and surrounds.

They would see these crosses with physical bodies on them. There would be no strangers to Roman crosses and the awful crucifixions. When our Lord says, take up the cross, they knew what that meant.

They knew what it meant. When those roads would be filled with crosses with people hanging on them, writhing on them in agony, excruciating, literally crucified, excruciating.

It's where you get the word from. Crucifixion, excruciating. It was a cruel instrument of death. And our Lord calls you and me to such, doesn't he?

[20 : 38] He calls us to take up your cross. Cross-bearing is not an easy road. Crucifixion was the most horrible of executions, the most painful form, the most horrible in all human history of a death, usually extremely slow in coming.

And the cross is a crude, heavy device of torture. Even just carrying it, just being lumbered with it, as it were, on the road, on the pathway to your execution.

That's the picture here, to be a disciple, the cost, the commitment, the cross of discipleship. The cross conveys a message of suffering, of death, of shame.

Will you be his disciple? A cross-bearing disciple will lay down their lives for Christ and his cause, for the gospel's sake.

It means death. Now, even today, amongst the more orthodox Jews in Israel and surrounds, those who would hold some orthodox views would actually hold a burial service for one of their number converting from Judaism to Christianity.

[22 : 00] They actually hold a burial service such that they signify that this one still alive is now dead to their family. All because they've renounced their Jewish faith and they've become Christians.

Now, what a blessing. And that's the reality. That's the reality in many places and countries and cultures today. For those who would pledge allegiance to Christ, who would say, I follow Jesus, it means they are dead to their families.

They virtually renounce their heritage, their inheritance, any legacy or connection to their family. And their family washes their hands of them.

It has no more to do with them. And in the first century AD, becoming a Christian costs you everything. Everything. Sometimes even your own life. And we know it's true still that this reality of trusting Christ can mean that you're cut off from family, from friends, rejected.

Someone has said a religion that gives nothing, costs nothing and suffers nothing is worth nothing. Christianity. Now, Christianity, of course, we know it's a free gift. Yet the discipleship, the sanctification, the walk with Christ is everything.

[23 : 20] It's laying yourselves down on the altar. It's willing to give your all, your everything. It means your surrender unto him. And the call goes out. The call is still the same today.

Follow Jesus. That's the call. Follow Jesus. Follow Jesus on his terms. Wherever he leads. Follow me, he says.

Will you? Follow me, he says. Follow me means going his way, not our own way. Following his plans, not our own. Obeying his will, not our own.

Following Jesus instead of our own inclinations. Such that we'll have that prayerfulness. Lord, what would you have me to do? What would you have me to say to be?

Where to go? What to do? Follow Jesus. That's the heart he wants in us. And it seems at times it's countercultural. It's counterintuitive.

[24 : 20] It goes against the grain, against the flesh. We don't sing, I did it my way anymore. We sing, I want to do it your way, as it were. We have that turning from and that turning unto, that repenting.

It's the sense of that 180 where we reject and leave and forsake and we follow and pursue and chase after as his followers and obeying his will, not our own.

And it seems strange and unnatural and contrary to our human inclinations and nature at times. Yet it is what he asks of us and he calls us to that. So to close, let's consider these truths we've heard tonight of the commitment of discipleship. He says deny yourself.

The cost of discipleship, it's a turning from our own way unto his way. The cross of discipleship, such that we're willing to carry that cross, that object of shame, and it still is an object of ridicule.

[25 : 32] And it's to our death because that's where the carrying of the cross leads to. It's a dying unto oneself. And it's a depending on the Lord.

Follow me, he says. Stop following our own way and inclination and follow after him. Follow hard after him. Run after him. Walk in his steps.

And if it be that his steps take you to the very cross. Keep walking, following on. Follow him. Now those steps of our Lord took him to the garden.

It took him to the place of punishment of his beating and ultimately his calvary.

And he calls us to that. And what must we do? Depend upon him. Trust upon him. Trust in him.

Mark 8.34 again. And when he had called the people unto him, with his disciples also he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[26 : 43] You've got your cross. It's got your name on it. Take up his cross. Each one has a cross to take, to carry, to shoulder, to wear, to bear.

And he says, follow me. Follow me. Be challenged tonight. And in closing really that your mission as his disciple means you're called to go and make disciples.

There's a sense where, as we know it says in the Great Commission of Matthew 28, verse 19, where he says, Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen. There's a sense where he says, Go ye therefore and teach all nations. You could render it, go and make disciples of all nations. The teaching is a making of disciples. But there's a sense where we're commissioned to that. Not only to be his disciple, but to be in the disciple manufacturing business, as it were.

[27 : 57] We are meant to be such that we would issue the call to others to come and join this cause. Is there not a cause? Can there be something more precious and more vital, more important, a message for us to impart as his disciples, as his people, as his messengers, that we would invite and extend that invitation to others to come and to know him, to receive his salvation, to trust him.

Go and make disciples. How can we invest in the lives of others such that the loved ones that we know, we want to see them in heaven, don't we? Don't we?

Nothing would be more important, really. My heart grieves for some. I'm not sure where they're at that I love and care about. Want to see them in heaven.

It would be such a sad thing to not see them there. And how can we invest in the lives of others? How can we be disciples? Making that commitment.

Calculating and paying that price, that cost. Carrying that cross. And seeing others, one, that they would be disciples too.

[29 : 21] That we can make disciples. God helping us that he would use you and me to communicate this saving gospel message. That Christ died for sinners. That by faith, through his grace, we can be saved.

In an eye blink for eternity, forever. And then grow to be his disciples. To walk with him. To follow after him. To grow in faith. To grow strongly as learners, as disciples.

Learning of him. As we, God helping us, he uses you to see others one to Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that your grace is sufficient. And it's your grace that saves. Lord, it can be not anything of ourselves, of our works, of our doing.

And likewise, Lord, it's our faith in your finished work that is our only hope. That we trust entirely in your doing at the cross.

[30 : 19] Lord, help us to hear your call to discipleship. To advance in our faith. Such that we put shoes on our faith, Lord. That it lives in our lives.

Lord, that we'll be a people that are willing to carry the cross. To bear the shame to take the cross daily, as it were. That we'll recognise we must be about our father's business.

Lord, that we must be conscious, ever conscious, soul conscious of those around us that are lost. That need support and encouragement in the things of God.

Lord, give us eyes to see souls all around us that you care about. Lord, that you died on the cross to save, Lord. That we can be messengers to them. And see them one in trusting you, to know you. To see them saved. To know the saviour. To know you, Lord. And to help them grow. To be disciples, Lord. That each one of us might be such a people.

[31 : 23] That we might be a disciple-making church. That we might see others strengthened. Who will want to come and learn. And grow. And to hear your teaching, Lord.

To hear your word. Sound teaching. Sound doctrine. Lord, that we'll be such a church. Help us, Lord, we pray. Pray if there's any struggling here tonight, for whatever reason. They might feel that their Christian walk is a hard one.

That you'll give them new energy. New gusto. New determination. New energy, Lord. New resolve. Lord, help us to not be deterred. We know the enemy would dog our steps.

And the enemy would like to drag us down. And make us turn around. Or weaken. Lord, yet we know you strengthen your people.

You are our strength. Pray for any that have yet to trust you. That even now they might, in simple faith, say, Lord, I believe.

[32 : 23] I believe you died on the cross for my sin. You rose again from the dead. And I trust you for your work of saving me. And I receive it as your gift to me.

By faith, I trust you now. And, Lord, for each one that we might have a faith that lives. A faith that is such that we're willing to lay down our lives for the gospel.

We'll hazard our lives. We'll lay down our necks, as it were. We'll be willing to pay the ultimate price, even to die for the faith.

But yet you call us, too, to live for the faith. That it'll be a living faith as we have life. That we'll be vibrant and living. Active Christians, help us to be such, Lord.
We know that the enemy would deter and weaken our resolve. Let us recognize his work and deny it. Deny our flesh, our self, and do your will and follow you.
[33 : 28] Help us, Lord, to follow you. And as we read your word, as we heed it, we'll hear your voice. And we will follow you as your sheep. Hear your voice.
We thank you, Lord, for these things. In Jesus' name, amen.