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[0 : 00] Thank you for tuning in today. I'm Mitch Sefton, youth pastor here at the First Christian Church. Today we're going to be continuing our studies through the book of Mark and looking a little closer at what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus.

We've been studying this topic for many weeks and there are so many valuable lessons that we can glean from the book of Mark. If you have missed a week, I would highly encourage you to go back and take a listen so you can stay up to date with us through this study.

When you take a look at the scriptures, when you really dive deep into what the meaning of them are, Jesus said some pretty controversial things. A lot of what he said probably didn't go over very well in his culture.

Today we're going to be diving into a passage of scripture that does just that. Jesus tells us something that is not easy to hear, easy to do, or even easy to understand at times. Today we're going to be hanging out in five very powerful verses.

These are some of the most important in all of scripture when it comes to the idea of what it means to follow Jesus. This sermon series is titled Disciple and that is exactly what we will continue to learn about from Jesus today.

[1 : 03] If you would go ahead and open your Bibles to Mark 8, we will be spending a majority of our time in verses 34 through 38, but you can turn to verse 22 to begin. But before we dive into the passage, I'd like to take just a moment to pray.

So if you would, please bow your heads with me. Father God, we thank you for this day and we thank you for your holy scriptures. We thank you for the blessing of the lessons that we can learn through those words. We thank you for the life of Jesus.

We thank you for the lessons that he teaches us, whether they are easy or hard to follow. Father, today we have a chance to talk about one and learn about one that is kind of hard.

Lord, and I pray, Lord, that we can just understand who you are a little bit more after today and that we can learn to take up our cross and follow you. We pray, Jesus, that you can just be glorified through this time in your precious and holy name.

Amen. Before we dive into Mark 8, 34, we need to have the setting set for you. In particular, this particular time in this story to understand the context of what is truly going on.

[2 : 08] If you take a look back just a few verses, you will find in verses 22 through 26, the story about Jesus healing the sight of a blind man. And it says in verses 25 and 26, it says, Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes.

Then his eyes were opened. His sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, Don't even go into the village. As they walked into the city after Jesus had healed the blind man, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah.

In Mark 8, 27 through 30, this is the conversation that they had. It says, Jesus and his disciples went on into the village of Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, What do people say I am?

They replied, Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets. But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am?

And that was Jesus talking to his disciples. And Peter answered, You are the Messiah. Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. You see, Jewish people have been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years.

[3 : 17] They had been reading about him and studying about him and knew many of the aspects that they would be looking for. As they were seeing it right before their eyes, many of them still did not realize that Jesus is what they had been waiting for.

And then we jump on to Mark 8, 31 through 33, where Jesus predicts his death to his disciples. He began to teach them. This is in verse 31.

It says, He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. When Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan, he said.

You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns. You see, Peter was the outspoken one of the group, and he took it upon himself to rebuke Jesus, which in my mind I think about the idea of rebuking Jesus, and first of all, I don't know that that's the best idea to begin with.

[4 : 25] But there's nothing more other than Peter's deep love and passion for the situation that is coming out in this particular moment. You see, Peter loved Jesus. Jesus was Peter's rabbi.

It's not that the disciples didn't believe what Jesus was saying. It's that they didn't like it. And this was his initial reaction to their rabbi telling this group of men and this group of people that he would eventually die.

He was who they followed, and he put their faith and trust in. To hear from Jesus that he would soon no longer be with them because of the mistreatment and the eventual death, that could not have been easy for them to hear.

You see, Jesus knew based on this group that Peter was not the only one that felt this way. This was when he states in verse 33, Get behind me, Satan. Jesus knew that it was not truly his disciples that were talking to him.

You see, the disciples were thinking only of the earthly concerns rather than the eternal consequences of Jesus dying for the sins of all man. I can't even imagine these conversations and what they must have been like to hear these types of things coming straight from the mouth of Christ.

[5 : 37] And this brings us to our passage today. You see, Jesus begins to teach one of the most powerful and difficult messages that he speaks in his ministry and on earth. Jesus asks us to sacrifice, to put down what we want for what he wants.

He asks us to deny ourselves. He asks us to pick up our own execution device, if that is what is truly needed, to follow him. Again, our passage today comes from Mark 8, verses 34 through 38, and here is what it says.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

So we're going to break down this particular passage into three separate segments. The first point for today in truly being a disciple of Jesus is this, and that is self-denial.

[6 : 57] It states in verse 34 the term deny themselves. As we look a little at the Greek word used here for denial, it actually holds a much stronger meaning than the word deny that we might use today.

I think about the context of sports when you might deny someone making a basket in the basketball game. Or a goalie might deny someone on a penalty shot. A catcher might deny a base runner from stealing a base.

Or we could look at it from a more practical state, where we might deny our children dessert because they didn't finish their dinner. Or someone might be denied a loan because of their credit score. Or we might be denied a job that we have applied for.

Our definition of the word deny is refuse to give or grant. The definition that we really need to focus on is that from the original Greek.

And the Greek word, *apardoniomai*, and that's a very difficult one to say, *apardoniomai*, so that is going to have the meaning of to have no association with or to disown completely.

[8 : 04] This is not a situation where Jesus says it's okay to turn away from most of your life, your old life, and then maybe deny all but certain aspects of your old life. Jesus is very clear when he said that you must totally disown the old you, the sinful person that you are, without him in order to

be his disciple.

You see, the Lord's point in saying that is that we must be willing to give up absolutely everything and deny all that we are and all that we have ever known, if that is what it takes to truly follow him. As I was studying this week, I was watching sermons and videos and doing lots of reading, and I found a short video about a man that truly has lived out the scripture of denying himself and totally disowning everything about himself.

You see, when this man was younger, he and four of his friends had picked on and beat up a young man at their school because he was a Christian. One night they had decided that they would kill him in the name of their God.

This group of boys hid in a tree only to jump the young man named Zachariah. They beat him to the point of having a broken arm and a broken leg, and he was screaming and bleeding, and they left him for dead that night.

[9 : 18] Zachariah was not to be heard from again. You see, many years later, that man's cousin was severely sick, and the doctors said that his young man, that his young cousin, the young cousin of this man would die.

A couple of Christians were there and wanted to pray over this child. Even though he hated Christians, he allowed it to happen. As the couple prayed over this child, he realized that they were speaking to God like he was their friend.

As he continued to observe, they finished their prayer, and the child opened his eyes for the first time in four weeks. He began to move his hands. He began to talk, and he was able to get up and walk.

The Christian that prayed began to speak to the man and ask him about Jesus and if he believed. He admitted that he believed in Jesus and that he was going to begin to read the Scriptures, and as he read the Scriptures, he began to have a love for Jesus and these people.

As he began his faith journey, his family that he loved so dearly disowned him because of his love of Christ. They even took it so far as to have a funeral for him to represent the death that he was to their family.

[10 : 27] This is a situation that truly represents what it means to deny yourself or completely disown your old self for the sake of Jesus and to become one of his disciples.

You see, this idea of self-denial is intentional disowning of self or stepping away from a relationship with just yourself as the primary or the center of that relationship.

Jesus is not making a statement about whether we are bad, but we are to be more closely associated with him, and our allegiance needs to be with him and not with ourselves.

You see, going back to finish this story, Zechariah actually met up with this particular man at a pastor's conference. They met again many, many years later. They recognized one another, and they told each other the story, and Zechariah had written this man's name in his Bible.

And Zechariah, since the time that he was attacked, had been praying for this man. And to see the way that this had happened, and this man had hated Zechariah for so many years only because he was a Christian, but to see the way that he had a chance to find out what the love of Jesus was like and only to meet up with the man that he had attacked and left for dead many, many, many years later was nothing more than a miracle, and by the grace of God.

[11 : 51] So the second characteristic that we're going to be talking about to be a disciple of Jesus is that of to be a cross-bearer and to be cross-bearing. It is so hard for us to totally fathom what it might mean to have to literally take up your cross the way it says in verse 34.

We see, we live in a place where dying for our faith is a fairly unheard of thing. I'm not going to say that there is not a chance that we could face death because of our love of Jesus, but the chances here in the United States are much less than that in the country where it might be illegal to be a Christian or where you might be highly persecuted for being a Christian.

You see, we have taken the cross and we have made it a decoration. We have taken the cross and we have made it a piece of jewelry. We've taken the cross and we've made it bumper stickers and t-shirt designs and so many more things.

Now hear me out on this when I say that there is nothing wrong with those things as long as they are not taking the place of what the actual cross is. But we cannot allow our only interaction with the cross to be putting it around our necks to wear around for the day as a piece of jewelry or to be putting it on as a t-shirt or just to be slapping it on the back of our car so that people know that we

go to church.

We have even made this particular saying very cliché in our faith and that is the saying of take up my cross or just bear, just my cross to bear something along those lines.

[13:13] I had a really hard week at work this week. Well, that's just my cross to bear. My kids are really struggling with their behavior. Well, that's just my cross to bear right now.

My mother-in-law is coming over for dinner tonight. Well, that's just my cross to bear right now. And I just want to clarify that's a joke because my mother-in-law, I really enjoy being around her and we get along just fine.

So that's not my case, but I'm sure that some of you might have that cross to bear, if you will. We use this term of it's my cross to bear without truly understanding the context of what Jesus is saying here.

You see, during the time of Jesus, there would have been, well, the time that Jesus would have been on earth, upwards of 30,000 Jewish people would have been executed by the way of crucifixion on a cross.

These people were tortured, ridiculed, embarrassed, mocked, and eventually put to death. This is what Jesus is saying to us. We have to be willing to bear our cross, which means we have to be willing to die for him.

[14:13] When we say yes to Jesus, we choose to follow him and call ourselves a disciple of Christ. This is what we must be willing to do. We must be willing to sacrifice our life for him the way that he sacrificed his life for us.

You move on to Luke 9, 23, where it talks about this and it takes it just a little bit farther about the idea of taking up your cross. And it says, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

We must daily be willing to take up our cross. We must live for Christ daily. Scripture does not say that we need to take up our cross on the days when we're going to be around our Christian friends. It does not say that we need to take up our cross when it's convenient or when we have time to do so.

Scripture does not say that we need to take up our cross or carry our cross just to look good in front of other people. You see, in order to be a true disciple of Jesus, we are to carry our cross and live for Jesus daily, even when it hurts, even when we don't want to, even when we might be a little bit embarrassed, even when we're around your friends from your past that maybe they don't know that you love Jesus at this point in your life and you're tempted to fall back into those ways of what you used to do with them.

Instead of showing them who Jesus is, you fall back into the temptation of what they used to do with them. You see, we can't live our lives with one foot in the world and one foot in eternity. We are called to daily take up our cross and be willing to literally die for Jesus at any given moment.

[15:37] I'll never forget hearing a convocation at the school that I taught at for many years by the father of Rachel Scott. You see, Rachel was a young lady that was killed in the Columbine shootings in 1999 because she was not willing to denounce her love of Jesus.

You see, Rachel was a true disciple of Jesus and she was willing to take it, take up her cross. She was not willing to give up her faith at the point-blank range and she was shot and died because of it. You see, whenever Pastor Ray delivers the invitation to accept Jesus, he uses the term count the cost. This is a cost that would definitely need to be counted. The question we need to ask ourselves is, are you willing to lay down your life completely for the one who laid down his for you?

Point number three that we can take from verse 34 is loyal obedience. What exactly does loyal obedience even look like? David Platt said it this way in one of the messages that I watched from him.

He said, It means you accept the suffering that comes with obedience over the comfort that comes with disobedience. Saying yes to God is one of the hardest but most rewarding things that you can do.

[16:51] There are so many times in life where we think we don't have time or it's not in our schedule. I'm not sure. I am sure I'm not the only one that will get an uneasy feeling in my body because I know that God is asking me to do something and I have resisted that nudge or the calling because it would affect my personal plans.

The hard part of all of this is that he does not promise sunshine and butterflies just because we say yes to being obedient to him. But what scripture does promise is that God will never leave us or forsake us.

One of my favorite passages in scripture comes from James 1, verses 2-4 where it says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. You see, through our obedience, we are becoming more and more Christ-like.

This is an absolute goal of a disciple, to continually become more like Jesus. When Jesus teaches on what it takes to follow him, he is preparing us for this particular scripture. We are to consider it joy when we face trials because we know that we are being more Christ-like.

[18:05] The more trials that we face and it brings us closer to Jesus, the more we will become mature and complete in our faith. So now, let's take those thoughts and we're going to move into verses 35-37.

Verse 35, it says, For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. Those willing to surrender their lives to Christ, choosing instead to hold on to sin, selfish ambition, and acceptance by the world.

When we are more concerned about the clothes that we wear, the car that we drive, the house that we live in, the friends that we have, the career that we hold, instead of the life that Christ has called us to, we are living the exact opposite of what scripture says.

Scripture does not say that these things are bad when kept in the right perspective. We need to be willing to give away the nice clothes to someone in need, to pick up someone and give them the ride in the nice car that you drive, invite people and share a meal at your house that you live in, sharing Jesus with people that you are around, or leading at our jobs in ways that are servant-minded and Christ-like.

It is about how we can glorify God and the things that He has blessed us with. You see, Jesus asks us two rhetorical questions in verses 36 and 37.

[19:22] The first one is, what good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or, what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? You see, the American dream can quickly corrupt our picture of what scripture says if all we are doing is chasing fame and fortune and just finding new people to impress around us.

We fall into this trap of whatever dies with the most toys wins. Well, reality says that whatever or whoever dies with the most toys still dies.

You see, Jesus is asking here in this situation, what does all of the stuff matter in the end if you're losing your soul? All of the fame and the accolades on earth will fade away, but scripture says in 2 Peter 3, verses 10 through 12, but the day of the Lord will come like a thief.

The heavens will disappear with a roar. The elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire and the elements will melt in the heat.

[20:40] I've never been to a funeral where the hearse is pulling a trailer full of the stuff of the person that has just passed away. This is not the reality. I can guarantee you that if that person did not know Jesus during their time on earth, that they would love to trade all of those possessions for just one more chance to say yes to him.

You see, we live in a society that is so stressed and anxious all the time that we can't be effective for him. Our overall stress and anxiety level cripples our ability to truly minister to other people. We get so wrapped up in the day-to-day that we miss the big picture of the life that God has truly called us to. Once we accept Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of our lives, Satan knows he no longer has us.

He has lost us forever, but now his new goal is that he will make you the most ineffective Christian that you can possibly be. This is why the idea of daily carrying that cross is so important.

Jesus is a must when fighting the daily battle with the dark side. As we come to the end of this passage, Jesus gives us a very stark warning that should really wake us up.

[21 : 47] And it says in verse 38 this, If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

You see, when looking at the Greek translation of the word ashamed in this passage, it means despise, reject, or refuse to accept. The only people that would be saved are the ones that are not ashamed of Jesus.

And that they are ashamed of themselves and the things that they have done. But they are not ashamed of Jesus. You see, when you look at someone that is a disciple of Jesus compared to that of someone that is not, true believers are characterized by brokenness, humility, and a sorrow that leads to repentance.

On the other side, a non-believer will take great pride in their sin. How much can you drink? How many people have you been with? How much money can you make? That's the stuff that you have, the accomplishments that your kids have.

And the list goes on and on and on. And none of these things matter if you are ashamed of Jesus. You see, these are only earthly things that push you farther and farther away from the Savior.

[23 : 00] We have focused so much on being in the world that our souls are dead toward God. We are bringing our own spiritual death. We are bringing on our own spiritual death because of how we are chasing the wrong things.

The warning is there. If you are willing to despise, reject, or refuse to accept Jesus on earth, He will do the same to you for eternity. The decision is for each of us.

Our decision can't be that of anyone else. You will not stand on judgment day before Christ Himself and say that my mom's faith, my dad's faith, my cousin's faith, my grandma's faith, my neighbor's faith was enough for me to be standing here as well.

We all know this is not how it works based on what Scripture says. It is for you personally. It is an individual decision and you must deny yourself.

You must daily carry your cross and you must follow Jesus with loyal obedience. So you have to make that decision. Is today the day for you?

[24 : 05] Is today that day that you will finally get it and understand that Jesus is calling you into a life-saving relationship with Him? He wants to spend eternity with you in paradise. The question is that you need to ask yourself is do you want to spend it with Him?

And are you ready to make the decision to deny yourself, carry your cross, and follow the Savior of the world with loyal obedience? If you would pray with me. Father, we thank You for this day.

And I thank You for the challenge that this Scripture gives us. And I pray, Lord, that we can learn to live more like You and just be Your disciples. And I pray, Lord, that these passages and these words and this message has just been something that is just stirring in the hearts of the people that are hearing it.

And I pray, Lord, that if they don't know You, that they come to know You. But if they do know You, I pray, Lord, that this has just been a re-energizing challenge to daily take up our cross and follow You.

Father, we thank You for Jesus and His sacrifice in Your precious and most holy name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.