

The king who demands everything

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[0 : 0 0] The reading is from Mark chapter 8 starting at verse 27 and that can be found on page 1017. And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and on the way he asked his disciples who do people say that I am and they told him John the Baptist and others say Elijah and others one of the prophets and he asked them but who do you say I am? Peter answered him you are the Christ and he strictly charged them to tell no one about him and he began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him but turning and seeing his disciples he rebuked Peter and said get behind me Satan for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man. And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and 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 life? For what can a man give in return for his life? 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.

Catherine thank you very much indeed I think you'll find it a help to keep that bible passage open it's page 1018 to lie up pray and ask for God to help us as we look at these verses together now. Our father we've just sung great things you have taught us great things you have done and we pray now that you would teach us afresh that we would understand more about the things that you have done and how you want us to respond and we ask it for Jesus's sake. Amen.

Now picture the scene this is a true story it was my first day as the new curate at a Church of England church in Sussex. The church was holding an event on the village green and eager to make a good impression I walk up to a lady from the church and introduce myself. So tell me about the town I say is there much to do here? Not particularly she replies there are a few shops but not much else.

My wife Patasha who's with me asks about the shops any nice ones she says. Nothing special comes the answer although there is a very good bra shop she says helpfully to my wife.

[3 : 2 0] Now normally I would have taken the mention of taking mention of the word bra as my cue to be quiet but when she said bra shop I heard brass shop and so still keen to form a good first impression I charge in curious as to what a brass shop was and what kind of brass might be on offer. What kind of brass does it sell I ask. She looked a bit puzzled thinking I was asking what kind of bras she politely replied well all sorts I guess. Still trying to keep the conversation going I probe further so do you like brass then?

At which point this lady must have been wondering who on earth their new curate was. Now fortunately the confusion was soon cleared up but you see it's possible to listen to someone converse with them think you know what's going on and yet completely miss the point. In fact to do so in a way where we make a total fool of ourselves completely blind to what's actually being talked about. And if you were with us on Tuesday or Thursday evening for the first of these Jesus re-examine talks which we've been having here at Grace Church this week you'll remember that in Mark chapter 8 which we're looking at this week Peter puts his foot in it and makes a fool of himself. As we saw he was in part spiritually blind and needed Jesus to bring clarity to his confusion. And yet it had all started so well hadn't it? Just have a look down with me at verse 29 once again. Jesus asked his disciples but who do you say that I am? And Peter got full marks for his reply. Peter answered him you are the Christ or the Messiah the title that the Old Testament gave to the one who would rule universally and eternally and perfectly. You see Peter had rightly recognized Jesus

as the matchless ruler. His ruler. The one who has the right to call the shots in our lives. But things quickly go downhill for Peter because having made this momentous discovery it seems that Peter and the other disciples had begun mentally measuring the curtains for their white hall offices and jostling for the leading positions in Jesus's cabinet in expectation that this mighty king would establish an earthly kingdom accompanied by all the trappings of high office.

[5 : 59] And so Jesus's next words came as a great shock to them. Do you remember verse 31? And Jesus began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

Far from entering Jerusalem to triumphantly liberate the city from Roman oppression Jesus would go there in order to die. Rather than a glorious throne his destiny would be a gruesome cross. Rather than a crown of gold he would wear a crown of thorns. And Peter objects. It made no sense to him. So he charges in with his two pennies worth in verse 32.

We're told Peter took him aside and began to rebuke Jesus. But however eager he may have been to make a good impression he was soon left red faced.

We're told that turning and seeing his disciples Jesus rebuked Peter and said get behind me Satan for you're not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[7 : 12] You see far from being a sign of defeat Jesus' death would be deliberate. That's why he said he must suffer in verse 31 because only at the cross can sins be forgiven.

Today is Mother's Day and the story is told of a forest fire in Australia which swept across a farmer's ranch. After the fire had passed the farmer wandered across his land to survey the damage. And as he did so he noticed in his fields the charred remains of a hen. He walked over curious to see why this hen had apparently made no attempts to escape the approaching danger. And as he looked down he heard the cheeps of several young chickens who were lying unharmed beneath their dead mother. The hen had spread her wings and her body over her chicks when danger came to protect them.

Out of her love she had laid down her life that they might have life. There was no other way they could have been saved. And that's why Jesus also had to die.

[8 : 24] He came not primarily to rescue us from earthly problems but from a far greater problem. The problem of sin. The problem of spiritual blindness as we saw the other night. The problem that we're facing the fire of God's rightful judgment because of the way we've rejected his rule over our lives.

Just as mothers make the most remarkable sacrifices for their children. So Jesus laid down his life as a sacrifice for each of us. The matchless ruler is also the selfless rescuer.

And in the rest of Mark 8 in the verses we're looking at this morning. Verses 34 to 38. Jesus continues to correct his disciples' misapprehensions about his kingly rule. And what it means to be his subjects.

And I want us to consider his radical teaching together under two headings this morning. First of all, Jesus demands everything. Jesus demands everything.

Look down with me at verse 34 once again. Verse 34. And Jesus called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[9 : 42] For whoever would save his life will lose it. Jesus says that if we want to be his people and benefit from his forgiveness, we must do three things.

And they're all really different ways of saying the same thing. So to start with, we must deny ourselves, he says. Now we often think of denying ourselves as denying ourselves the pleasures of life.

Like, I don't know, giving up chocolate for Lent or going on a diet. But Jesus means something far more far reaching here. We know what it means actually to deny someone from what happens later on in Mark's gospel.

Do you remember when Peter denies Jesus? He says of Jesus, I don't know this man you're talking about. And to deny self is therefore to say of ourselves, I don't know Rupert Evans.

Or whoever it is. In other words, I'm not going to live for myself and my name and my reputation, my desires and ambitions. But for Jesus instead. It's denying self-rule.

[10 : 49] Because after all, we're not the real rulers of our lives. The next image Jesus uses is even more stark.

He says anyone who wishes to come after him must also take up his cross. And again, the force of Jesus' statement here is something we can downplay, I think, by talking about how we all have our crosses to bear.

You know, the little inconveniences or frustrations of life. But Jesus' disciples would have understood something very different by his words. Because the only people who carried their crosses in Jesus' day, as Jesus himself later does of course, were condemned men on their way to die.

Those facing crucifixion. So Jesus is calling his disciples to die. Or in the language of verse 35, to lose their life.

Now of course many Christians have lost their lives for Jesus, literally, as most of those first disciples actually did. It's estimated that 26 million Christians were martyred in the 20th century alone.

[11 : 59] But notice that Jesus isn't talking here just about the fanatical Christian. Or Christians who live in the Middle East, perhaps. Or the disciples.

He says, if anyone would come after me, let him, or other translations say, echoing Jesus' own words in verse 31, he must take up his cross.

This is a condition of discipleship for every Christian. Not only are we to deny self, we're also to die to self.

To die to self-rule. And live for Jesus instead. A number of years ago now, I was speaking about Jesus at a school in Buckinghamshire. And before I spoke, a gap year student was asked to explain why he'd become a Christian.

In a question time afterwards, one of the pupils asked him what it had cost him to follow Jesus. And I was very struck by his reply. I thought he'd say that it had cost him his reputation a bit among his mates, or meant he'd had to change his lifestyle or something.

[13 : 06] But instead he said this. He said, it cost me my life. It cost me my life. Isn't that striking?

But that's the demand Jesus actually makes of all his followers. Jesus demands everything. Our whole lives.

James Calvert was a missionary to the Fijian Islands in the South Pacific 150 years ago. When he asked the captain of his ship to let him and his men off at an island known to be inhabited by cannibals, the captain refused, saying they would be dead within minutes of arriving.

But Calvert, eager to share the good news of Jesus with these Fijians, simply responded, Sir, we died before we came.

We died before we came. He was a man who had already heeded Jesus' call to take up his cross, and so no longer cared about his own life or safety.

[14 : 08] So Jesus says we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. And he then says that those who would come after him must also follow him. Back in verse 33, Jesus had said to Peter, get behind, or literally, after me.

In verse 34, he also talks about the need to come after him, and again here, to follow him. It's a reminder that we must let Jesus run the show.

That we can't do what Peter had done and think we know better. All three of these things, denying self, taking up our cross, and following Jesus, are really a way of saying we must let Jesus wear the crown in our lives.

So he must determine what we believe and how we behave, our priorities and prayers, our decisions and diaries, how we speak and what we watch, our sex lives and social lives, our use of social media and our use of our finances.

As has often been said, if he's not Lord of all, Jesus is not Lord at all. Now I guess this sounds hard.

[15 : 20] It would have done to those first disciples, but let's remember a couple of things before we move on. For one thing, Jesus is only asking us to live as we ought to, to live logically and rightly in light of verse 29.

Because you see, if Jesus is the Christ, the king who rules over all people for all time, then of course we must follow him and surrender to his rule.

That's what you're supposed to do with a king, isn't it? Live as his subject. But also, let's remember that Jesus is no tyrant. He's a wonderful king, who will one day establish a wonderful kingdom.

The first eight chapters of Mark's gospel show us a king whose rule is magnificent beyond our wildest dreams, a king able to eliminate all suffering and sorrow. And when he calls us to take up

our cross, he's only asking us to do what he has first done for us.

In 2016, the queen celebrated her 90th birthday. And to commemorate the event, this book was produced with a foreword written by the queen herself.

[16:31] It's entitled, *The Servant Queen and the King She Serves*. And it's a book about two rulers, the queen, and the book documents her remarkable service over so many decades.

But also Jesus Christ, the one to whom the queen herself attributes the inspiration for her service.

The queen says that she serves others in order to serve Jesus, who first served her.

Jesus was a servant king. And like the queen, we're simply to follow in his footsteps. Jesus only asks us rightfully to do what he has first done for us, to whom he owed nothing.

The queen, of course, never has to cook a meal for herself, but apparently she has always personally fed her beloved corgis herself, despite their lowly status. And Jesus, in a similar way, lowered himself.

To serve us. And just as the queen's corgis, I guess, joyfully show loyalty and obedience to their mistress, the queen, in that way that dogs do. So we're to do the same with Jesus.

[17:41] He's a great master to serve. Jesus demands everything from us, but he first gave everything for us. But of course, there's another motivation for following Jesus in these verses.

And that brings us on to the second thing I want us to notice, which is this. Jesus' followers gain everything. Jesus demands everything, and Jesus' followers gain everything.

Let me read from verse 35. This is time. Have a look down with me as I do. Jesus goes on. 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 life? For what can a man give in return for his life? 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.

Yes, following Jesus will mean losing our life now as we die to self. But not only is it, of course, the best way to live in this life, since Jesus, as our creator, knows how life is best to be enjoyed.

[18:59] Ultimately, it's worth it in eternity. That's what Jesus means when he says, whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

We'll save it eternally. We won't have to face God's rightful judgment for our rejection of him because by turning from our sin to Jesus, the rightful king, we'll receive his forgiveness, his royal pardon.

If you were with us midweek, you may remember I mentioned some words of Napoleon where he listed some of the most powerful men in history, men who, according to Napoleon, nonetheless pale into insignificance when compared to Jesus' authority and character.

Well, one of those men was Charlemagne, the first, greatest and most famous emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. And in AD 1000, 180 years after his death, officials of the Emperor Otto opened Charlemagne's tomb and were met by an amazing sight.

There amongst countless treasures was the skeleton of King Charlemagne, seated on a throne with the crown still on his head, a copy of the gospels lying in his lap, and one bony finger resting on the text of Mark chapter 8, verses 36 and 37.

[20:19] 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?

Charlemagne, the most powerful and wealthy man of his day, who ruled over a united Europe, was reminding us that even if we gain the whole world, as I guess in a sense he did, it's of infinitely less value than our souls.

I guess many of us have been watching the Winter Olympics and Paralympics. The athletes competing have made enormous sacrifices for the last four years, all for the sake of winning a gold medal. Well, how much more ought we to be willing to deny self for a little while in this world, in order to win an eternal crown that will endure forever?

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? I guess many of us would have read about the death two weeks ago of the American evangelist Billy Graham, who ministered to millions across the globe and held personal audiences with 12 successive US presidents.

Many will also know of his famous words a number of years ago when speaking about his death. He said this, You see, he was a man who believed Jesus' words in Mark 8.

[21 : 58] He understood that Jesus' followers will be more alive, far better off, beyond this short life. Those who lose their life now for Jesus will save it for eternity.

Because just as in verse 31, Jesus says his resurrection will follow his death, so those who follow his example in taking up their cross can also look forward to life beyond the grave in a perfect world. Jesus' followers will gain everything. It's a great motivation to follow Jesus. But mark a somber note with a solemn warning.

Have a look at verse 38 at the end. 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.

Now that title, Son of Man, is Jesus' favourite name for himself and is a reference to Daniel chapter 7 in the Old Testament where the Son of Man proceeds from God's own presence and is given all authority over all peoples for all time.

[23 : 10] It's a chapter we were looking at at Grace Church only a couple of weeks ago. And back in verse 31 of Mark 8, Jesus had therefore used the title in a very surprising way. No wonder Peter reacted as he did.

The idea that the Son of Man must suffer and be killed just didn't seem to fit to the Old Testament picture. But when the title reappears a few verses later at the end of the chapter, here in verse 38, it's much more in line with Daniel's teaching and Peter's expectations.

Because the Son of Man, Jesus, will one day come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. He will one day return to earth in staggering, blazing, unimaginable, terrifying, majestic glory surrounded by an army of angels.

Could be today. He will establish a kingdom actually far greater than that Peter had hoped and imagined. But the point of these very contrasting references to the Son of Man is that the route to glory for Jesus had to come via the cross.

And the route to glory for us too must also come by taking up our cross. And if we won't do that, we need to realize there will be consequences.

[24 : 36] Peter reacted so badly to Jesus' mission because he thought Jesus had come to establish his kingdom and crush his enemies. And verse 38 shows us he was wrong actually only about the timing.

You see, if we're ashamed of Jesus' words, I think particularly here that's a reference to ashamed about what he says about how we need him to go to the cross if we're to be made right before God. If we're ashamed of that and ashamed to take up our own cross for him, if we proudly think that we can stand before God without Jesus' royal pardon or that we can live for ourselves and gain the whole world in this life with no eternal consequences, then we're in for a great shock because we'll forfeit our soul, the most precious thing we have, the only thing that really matters.

See, on the scale of our short lives, you could put gaining the whole world on one side, achieving every ambition we've ever had, knowing fame, fortune and finances beyond our wildest dreams and yet when weighed against the value of our eternal souls, those things are nothing, utterly inconsequential.

Jesus demands everything but his followers gain everything. Now I'm conscious there may be people here this morning in a number of different places when it comes to the Christian faith. Many of us here will of course be Jesus' followers and I guess this passage challenges us as to whether we really have died to self and really are taking up our cross daily to follow Jesus.

[26 : 19] Peter understood Jesus' first lesson here in this chapter that he's the matchless ruler, the Christ. Many of us, I think, also understand his second lesson that Peter failed to grasp that he's the selfless rescuer who laid down his life that we might have forgiveness.

But in my experience, too few really grasp Jesus' third lesson, his call to be a reckless follower. Because we can't have Jesus as saviour if we won't also have Jesus as Lord.

I wonder where we need to remember that this morning. Others here may, I guess, not yet be ready to start following Jesus.

But perhaps there are some who realise how much is at stake and who want to find out more and see whether we really can trust Jesus with our lives. and if that's you, as Simon said earlier, there are a number of possible ways we'd love to help you to do that after this week.

There's a table at the back which has various pieces of literature. There's a couple of books there that I think you would find helpful if you want to think more about Christian things. Well, why not pick

up a free copy of Mark's Gospel and read more about Jesus and who he is and what he came to do.
[27 : 30] But as Simon says, we particularly want to recommend that Christianity Explored course that we run here at Grace Church. It should be a great way to think more about Jesus and to see whether the claims here really do stack up and hold weight, hold water.

So there are a number of ways we can investigate further. But as we close, it may just be that one or two here are ready to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus this morning. And if that's you, then I'm going to finish by praying a prayer that you can silently echo in your heart if you want to become one of Jesus' followers today and so know the certain rescue and hope that he brings.

I'm going to read out the prayer first of all so we all know what it says. And then I'll pray it a second time more slowly with a pause after each line so that those who want to can echo it in their own hearts.

The prayer will go like this. King Jesus, I acknowledge that you are the matchless ruler who deserves to run my life. I'm sorry that I have failed to live with you in charge and have gone my own way.

[28 : 34] Please forgive me. Thank you that you are also the selfless rescuer who died in my place on the cross to give me a royal pardon. Please help me to deny myself, take up my cross and follow you from now on so that I might save my life forever.

So that's the prayer. Can I suggest we have a moment of silence so we can consider how we each wish to respond to what we've heard this morning and this week from Mark 8 and then I'll pray that prayer and those who want to can echo it silently in their own hearts.

A few moments of silence. Let's pray. King Jesus, I acknowledge that you are the matchless ruler who deserves to run my life.

I'm sorry that I have failed to live with you in charge and have gone my own way. Please forgive me. thank you that you are also the selfless rescuer who died in my place on the cross to give me a royal pardon.

[29 : 59] Please help me to deny myself, take up my cross and follow you from now on so that I might save my life forever.

Amen.