

# Mark 8:27-30

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So today we re-enter into the wonderful world of the Gospel of Mark. Those of you that have forgotten, about six or seven weeks ago, we were in the middle of the Gospel of Mark. Now let me give you a little reminder of what was going on there. We cut off right in the middle, and so we are re-entering directly in the middle, and the plot of the narrative is thickening. Jesus has been teaching, Jesus has been healing, Jesus has been casting out demons, and this is creating just a slight bit of tension in the world of the first century Middle East, and it's reaching the breaking point. Now this whole Gospel of Mark is about one single question. It's about who is this Jesus? And it's right in the middle of the Gospel that the question itself is overtly asked by Jesus himself. He looks at his disciples and he says, who do people say that I am? And his people give the public opinion poll of different answers, but he doesn't let his disciples settle for the court of public opinion. He says, but who do you personally say that I am?

It's the central question of the Gospel, and it's the central question of every human life. Now in the Gospel of Mark, Mark has already made it really clear to us what the answer to this question is, like in verse one of chapter one. He says, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Christ, the Son of God. And then right here in the middle, in verse eight, chapter eight, verse 29, you get Peter confessing that Jesus is the Christ. And then it's not until chapter 15, verse 39, after Jesus breathes his last on the cross, one of the soldiers says, surely this man was the Son of God.

And so the whole picture of the Gospel of Mark is that you get this central question literally in the middle of the Gospel, who do you say that I am? And it's been answered at the very beginning, and it's answered at the very end who Jesus is. But the surprising thing is that all the characters that are in the narrative in between, it's not so clear to them who this Jesus is. You get a range of leaders that are rejecting Jesus. You get a range of helpless people who know they have no hope in life, and they're receiving Jesus with open arms. And then you get the disciples that are somewhere in between, and here, rebuking Jesus. And the whole Gospel of Mark is designed this way. It's designed not only to present us with the central question of who is this Jesus, and force us, not allow us to get off the hook with answering that question. It also presents us with the realities of human life, and all of its neediness, and all of its complexity, and all of its blindness, and all of its confusion, because it wants to draw people, real people, you and me people, fallen and complex and confused people, into the life of following Jesus Christ. And so it's part of the things that I love about Mark, is things are not neat and tidy. It's Jesus going to the cross, inviting his people to follow him. So we enter into the middle of this story as the plot is thickening. And Jesus decides that as the plot is thickening, it is time for some intensive teaching about mission and discipleship. He doubles down as things get intense.

And so we jump in here at the beginning of a two and a half chapter discipleship master class. Jesus speaking not only about his cross, but what is it going to look like to follow him in this.

And before we jump into it, one of the amazing things about this discipleship master class is that at the beginning and at the end, there is an episode of Jesus healing somebody who's blind.

[ 3 : 50 ] So the implication is, is Jesus is saying at the beginning and at the end, what I'm telling you, you're not going to get unless I heal you. What I'm telling you, you're not going to get unless I allow you to be able to see it again.

And so even in the very things that I'm going to talk about, and some of them are difficult for us to hear because it's Jesus telling us about the cost of discipleship in some ways, and his all encompassing call on our lives to follow him no matter what comes after. We need to hear Jesus saying that in the context of, I have come to say these things to you to heal you so that you can see clearly again. And so our passage has a twofold focus. In verses 31 to 33, we are told of the unexpected cost of redemption. And then in verses 34 to 38, we are told of the unexpected cost of following the Redeemer.

So the unexpected cost of redemption comes in verse 31. Jesus must suffer, he says.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must, notice that word, must. Three times Jesus is going to predict his death, and the first time the emphasis is on the necessity of it. 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 to his disciples plainly. The word here, plainly, is this is the only time this word is used in the first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke. And it is a word that other places in the New Testament is translated boldly or confidently. So it's as if to say, in the midst of all the confusion that's raging in the world, Jesus is confident about this one thing. He came to do this one thing. And he's not unsure of it at all. He must do this, no matter how unsure his disciples are.

So it's an astonishing fact. Jesus says, I must come to suffer and be rejected and killed and rise again. And this is totally what nobody expected. Because expectations of the Christ in the ancient world, would he become the one who comes with the sword to slay the Romans and to free us from their political oppression? Biblical visions of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is that this is the conquering warrior who would have all power and authority in heaven and earth, and who would never, his rule would never be compromised. So for Jesus to say that he must do this, well, it throws the disciples for a tailspin.

[ 6 : 40 ] And it doesn't compute. So you get Peter, while the rest of the disciples are reeling, pulling Jesus aside. He's the ringleader, rebuking Jesus. It ignites a counter-rebuke from Jesus. So we have an exchange of rebukes between Jesus and the disciples. Things are intensifying. And this rebuke word is the word that's used throughout the Gospel of Mark for when Jesus commands and casts out demons from people.

This is no civil disagreement. This is no cordial conversation. This is a colliding of competing visions of what is good and evil. Peter sees a crucified Lord as something beyond comprehension.

Something that's going to be helpful to no one. And something that in its very essence might actually be evil. And Jesus says, Peter, if you ignore or downplay the cross and the centrality of the cross and my mission, then you are setting yourself against God and partnering with Satan.

It's hard to conceive of a more tense moment. It's hard to conceive of a more significant moment. Now, why is it so important to get this straight?

Why is this the first point that Jesus makes in his discipleship masterclass? Hey guys, I've invited you to follow me. It's this.

[ 8 : 09 ] Because Jesus' suffering is going to set the terms for discipleship. Jesus' suffering is going to set the terms for discipleship. The foundation and the form of discipleship.

And it's amazing to me because throughout the next three chapters, Jesus covers a whole host of topics with his disciples. Because Jesus believes that all of life is discipleship.

So he talks about divorce and marriage. He talks about children. He talks about money. He talks about power dynamics and leadership in the world.

He covers all these things that are the things of real human life. Because Jesus sees all of life as discipleship. Yet he wants us to know at the very beginning that in order to live all of human life in the way that he is intended in following him, we're going to have to have a total shift in perspective that is based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Understanding what it means to follow him is going to mean adopting a whole new perspective on life and death. And I think there's another reason why Jesus starts here.

[ 9 : 23 ] It's because leaning into Jesus' gospel vision of life, marriage, parenting, money, power, leadership, will require Jesus' gospel grace through his death.

Grace changes our perspective on everything and that it empowers us to live in light of that change.

So Jesus saying, get behind me, Satan, in verse 33, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of humans, is very significant for everything that is to follow.

So it's first the unexpected cost of redemption that Jesus holds before us, and it's second the unexpected cost of following the Redeemer.

Verse 34, And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, notice how now Jesus calls the crowd. Isn't that a fascinating thing?

[ 10 : 24 ] So far it's been a conversation with his disciples and now he's widening it out as if to say this call to discipleship is for everybody. If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.

This is a really fascinating thing. Because the cross in the ancient world is not just a symbol of death, it's an instrument of terror and execution and shame.

Public scorn and shame. It would have been seen as the means by which Roman authorities executed the ones they wanted to rid from the face of the earth.

To get the more evocative emotional response that somebody would have had to hearing this back in the day is to think of the electric chair. Or of the lynching tree.

It's a shameful thing. And Jesus is saying that in order to follow him, we have to join him on the way to execution. So Jesus is depicting discipleship as an intentional dying following.

[ 11 : 40 ] It's a journey towards the cross. It's a journey towards the cross. And this is a fascinating thing because I talked about the dynamics of power that Jesus addresses.

The disciples not far after this are like, Jesus, which one of us can sit at your right and left hand? Which one of us will you put in charge in the kingdom of God? And Jesus says, you're getting this whole thing wrong.

Because while the world goes high, I'm inviting you to go low. While the world grasps after positions of power, I'm asking you to serve. While the world seeks to protect their life, preserve their life, often at the expense of other people's lives, I'm asking you to lay it down.

So following Jesus, we discover, is not always going to look how we want it to or how we expect it to. It's not always going to look how we want it to or how we expect it to.

I think this is an important thing for us because even if we're not like full health and wealth prosperity gospel people, which I hope we're not, I think sometimes we can have this innate sense in us that if we follow Jesus, the result of that is going to be some sort of prosperity and peace and safety.

[ 13 : 14 ] Like deep down inside. And the way you know that's actually what's subtly going on in your heart is when things don't go the way you want them to in your life.

And then you see the emotions well up in you. You see the anger. You see the disappointment. You see the despair. And it starts to reflect back on you and you go, oh, did I actually miss what Jesus called me to?

Jesus warned about this in the parable of the sower. He said there would be some seed who's scattered on rocky ground and then when the sun comes out, it's scorched. And this is an image of those who immediately receive the word of God with joy and they endure for a while.

They're on the track following Jesus. And then when tribulation and persecution arises on account of following Jesus, immediately they fall away. It's Jesus. And so Jesus in his wisdom, in his love, in his patience, in his graciousness, as he begins his discipleship masterclass, he wants this to be the first word.

Following me is going to be costly at times. And not just general, like it's difficult to live in the world, but more particular, like following Jesus in a world that rebuked and rejected him.

[ 14 : 41 ] Living right side up in an upside down world is going to be uncomfortable. And Jesus does not want us to get caught off guard and he doesn't want our faith to be shaken when it gets hard. He says, come, follow me.

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. Now, some of you may be thinking at this point, wasn't it Jesus who said, my yoke is easy, my burden is light.

Like, come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Like, where did that go? Was that just Matthew and Mark? I don't know. How does that square with Jesus' words about the cost of discipleship?

I think the key has to do something with the surprising nature and power of grace. And this is right here in the Gospel of Mark. Chapters 6 through 8 leading up to the center point are all about the symbolism of bread.

Do you remember that? Oh, that's disappointing. I think David and I were pretty excited about this for about three weeks in November. So, it was all about bread.

[ 15 : 53 ] And bread was this symbol of the lavish abundance and power of Jesus' grace to a world in need. That's why Jesus was always providing bread for people and that's why when his disciples were with him and they're crossing the sea, he's asking them, why don't you understand about the bread?

Because what Jesus is saying there is he wants his disciples to get a sense of the abundance of his goodness and his grace. But then on the next two and a half chapters it's all about the cross.

Jesus pressing upon his disciples the cross, never letting them get away from thinking about the cross, always teaching them ever deepening aspects about the cross. And so the symbolism of bread, abundance, and cross belong together in the logic of the gospel.

The abundance of Christ's grace comes to us through the cross. And there's a wonderful application to this. It's that the meaning of our suffering becomes an opportunity to discover more of the riches of his grace.

If his grace comes to us through suffering, then in our suffering we can discover the riches of his grace that comes to us. How is this so?

[ 17 : 15 ] I think in verses 35 to 38 Jesus gives us three reasons why we should count the cost and follow him. There are some warnings there that have grace implicit with them, but there's also some grace that shines very clearly.

The first reason is in verse 35. Jesus says, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake and the gospels will save it.

And the reason is this. A person cannot keep their life, but they can freely give and receive it.

Let me say that again. A person cannot keep their life, but they can freely give and receive it.

Notice here that the heart of verse 35 is not a future reward for present discipleship. It's not sacrifice a lot now and you're going to get good stuff later.

[ 18 : 22 ] It's a free exchange of gifts that is pictured. Disciples are invited by Jesus to give their lives, the life of the old fallen creation to the Redeemer now.

And they're told that their lives will be saved, that the Redeemer will give a life of new creation back to the disciples in the future. So what we have here is something much more beautiful than a merit and reward sort of exchange.

We have a free giving, a free receiving, a free trust, and a free love. There's this way in which we give to God all the things that we hold dear in this life, our family and our money and maybe our very own lives.

And Jesus gives back to us life in abundance and better than we could have ever imagined it. The second reason, verses 36 to 37, for what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?

What can a person give and return for their soul? I think the reason is this, a person can purchase the world but not their soul. A person can purchase the world but not their soul, meaning nothing of the currency and capital of this world has the value or purchasing power to restore the soul.

[ 19 : 49 ] I once saw this verse inscribed in the archway of a Greek Orthodox chapel in Southern California. I know that's a weird combination, Greek Orthodox chapel in Southern California.

It was beautiful. You would go in for the service and it took me by surprise. As I was exiting to go back into the world after worshiping God on the archway was this verse, what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?

As if to clarify what mission we were sent on. And it's this fascinating economic language that Jesus uses here, gaining the world, losing the self.

I think there's a powerful illustration of this that Leo Tolstoy told in his short story, how much land does a man need? How much land does a person need?

I don't know if you've ever read this story. It's stunning. I'll just, but I'm going to ruin it for you now if you haven't. The protagonist of the story is a peasant and he says at the beginning, if I had plenty of land, I shouldn't even fear the devil himself.

[ 20 : 59 ] Then notice the desires of the peasant. And so the peasant becomes possessive of his land. He wants more and more of it. And he amasses a small fortune over time, but he's frustrated that he's renting and he's not, that he's renting and he doesn't know.

Does that sound familiar to you guys? Yeah, yeah. He hears of a group of people, simple-minded tribal people who own a huge amount of land, and they strike a deal with him.

They will give him as much land as he can mark off by foot before sunset. So realizing his greed, I mean, he's marching out there, he's going as far as he can, and he kind of sees the sun about midday, he's like, I should probably turn around now, but maybe I'll just do a few more steps and get a little further, and realizing that in his greed, eventually he's tried to mark off too much land, he starts running home as the sun is setting.

And the group of people are cheering him as they run, they're celebrating him trying to get as much land as he can, and right before sunset, he has a heart attack and dies.

And the people bury him in an ordinary grave only six feet long, thus answering the question posed by the title of the story, how much land does a person need?

[ 22 : 24 ] We laugh, but it's so perceptive. It's the sad irony of a parable. People seeking after more and more and more, and they lose their life and their soul in the process.

Jesus basically just says to us, don't do that. It's not the good life. Come follow me.

Let me show you a different way. I am that different way. And there's a third reason that he gives.

And this one's a little sobering, but it's still important because Jesus says it. Verse 38, for whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, and that language is language taken straight from the Old Testament prophets of God describing his people oftentimes.

Of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in glory, the glory of his Father with holy angels. So the third reason is a person will receive from Jesus in the life hereafter, what Jesus received from them in this life.

[ 23 : 43 ] Now I said earlier that there's warning implied in grace, and there's grace that shines through in warning. Here we see this notion of being ashamed.

Shame is not wanting to associate with someone or something. The cross is a symbol of shame in the ancient world. Jesus was not ashamed to bear our sins on the cross.

But here he reiterates that if we are ashamed to identify with him and his cross, which is for our shame and our sin, then in the end he will not associate with us.

And this is why Paul continues to reiterate this theme throughout his letters. It's a marvelous thing. Have you noticed how Popton says, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Because it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe, the Jew first than the Greek.

And then notice in Philippians, that was Romans 1, and then in Philippians 1, Paul says, he is not ashamed of the suffering that he is enduring for the sake of the gospel. Because in the ancient world, as in our world, to suffer is a shameful thing.

[ 24 : 57 ] It's weakness, it feels. It's not success, it's not the victory, it's not the picture of the good life that is sold to us and that we want to buy into and believe and achieve.

But Jesus came to take that shame and he invites us to walk the path of the cross with him. So I want to circle back as we conclude to the main question. Who do you say that I am?

Because I think that is so central. our view of Jesus is going to shape our view of discipleship is what we're seeing. Our experience of Jesus is going to shape our experience of discipleship is what we're seeing.

And so I think it's so helpful for us to see that Peter's own journey in this regard was one of having to have his eyes opened and come to renewed faith. Notice how Peter in the gospels rebukes Jesus.

He pulls out the sword to defend Jesus from suffering. And when Jesus is suffering he denies him altogether. But it's only a number of years later that when Peter is writing a letter to some churches who are suffering under the Roman emperor of that time he says this to them.

[ 26 : 13 ] Notice his change in tone. Beloved do not be surprised by the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you. As though something strange were happening to you. Then Peter himself writes but rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed says Peter because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

If anyone suffers as a Christian let them not be ashamed. there is that word but let them glorify God in that name. Peter the one who rebukes and who denies Jesus is the very one who writes these words to encourage other Christians in the midst of following Jesus.

What happened in between? There was a meal. The risen Jesus comes to the beach. Peter has given up and he's gone to fishing and Jesus cooks some breakfast for him and says Peter come back.

And at that meal Jesus asked Peter three times very simply Peter son of John or Simon son of John do you love me? Do you love me?

[ 27 : 38 ] And there's this wonderful moment of restoration that happens in Peter's life and it is the hinge point between rebuke and denial and joy and love. love. And that's the marvelous thing about the whole gospel story as we see it told is that Jesus counted the cost for our redemption out of love.

And that with his disciples they ask he asks them to count the cost of discipleship out of love. He is worthy. He will hold us fast.

And in the end the life with which he will bless us will be more magnificent than anything we ever experienced in this life. My brothers and sisters I say these things to you in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit.

Amen.