

The Way of the Cross

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. We're glad you have joined us this morning on this Palm Sunday. You know, on that first Palm Sunday that happened, there was a victory parade. Jesus came in humility on a donkey, but the crowds looked at him and they said, our king has come.

But in their minds, this king had come to overthrow Rome. They were looking for an army, whether it be a physical army or an army of angels, to overthrow the great oppressor that they lived under and to establish a new nation state of Israel with its former glory, its prosperity, its power. They thought that Jesus had come to bring an earthly kingdom and they misunderstood him deeply. I wonder, friends, this morning, as we gather, if we are prone to similarly misunderstanding Jesus in different ways. In our culture today, maybe we misunderstand Jesus as coming to make our lives easier and better. Jesus is a self-help, a self-advancement program where we connect with the divine and that brings us a little bit better life than we thought before. Jesus is like an add-on, a new app in our phone that helps produce a little bit greater spiritual productivity in our lives. Maybe we think that Jesus has come to give us a manual for self-salvation. That is, if we can be good people, good enough in the right ways to the right people, that maybe God will accept us because we've met the standard.

If you were a Jew in the first century, you might think, well, if I follow the law, that will be enough. Certainly, Christians over the centuries have thought that being good moral people and being a part of attendance at a gathering like this, isn't that enough?

[2 : 15] There are lots of ways in which we misunderstand the gospel. Today, perhaps one of the great challenges is what I'm going to label an over-realized eschatology.

What does that mean? We think that because Jesus has risen from the dead, he's come here now to fix everything, all of our problems. This is what the prosperity gospel promises, that Jesus has come to make you healthy, wealthy, and wise in this life with all of that.

Why is it such a big deal if we misunderstand? Well, because misunderstanding Jesus can lead to spiritual ruin. Because when we think that Jesus is promising something that he hasn't promised us, those false expectations are disappointed, and that disappointment leads to despair and a crisis of faith.

How can I believe? Because Jesus hasn't come through for me. How often do we come to Jesus with conditions? As long as Jesus says, these things for me, my expectations, my standards, I will believe.

But if not, I don't know anymore. So the stakes are high in understanding Jesus rightly. The stakes are high in knowing what he's actually come to do.

[3 : 44] And this leads us to our text today. If you're visiting, we're in a series in the book of Mark. We'll be looking at Mark chapter 8. We'll be looking at verses 34 through 38.

In the Pew Bible, it's page 793. So you can turn there if you'd like to have that. And if you remember, as you're turning there, remember that this is, chapter 8 is sort of the high point, the apex of the book of Mark.

It is the gravitational center where leading up to it, it is, who is this Jesus? And then from here on, it's Jesus living out what that calling looks like and calling his disciples to follow him.

And if you were here last week, you'd remember that the context of verse 34 is, Jesus has come to the disciples and said, what do people think I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ.

And then Jesus responded and said, you're right. And then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer and must die and must rise again. And Peter said, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's not right.

[4 : 50] That doesn't match my understanding of why you've come. And Jesus rebukes him and says, you are thinking of the things of man, not the things of God.

And that leads us to our text this morning. So Mark 8, we're going to start in verse 34. We're going to read through verse 38.

The slides will include chapter 9, verse 1. Some Bibles put it with this. I actually think there's a good reason to say it goes with the passage afterwards. And I'm just not going to deal with it.

Come see me afterwards if you want to know what I think it says. But Mark 8, verse 34. And he, that is 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.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

[6 : 01] For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and 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.

Let's pray and ask God to help us understand this text. Lord, we do come before you and we thank you. We thank you that you have not left us to grope and grasp to understand you, but that you have revealed yourself.

Lord, you've revealed yourself in the person of Jesus and you've revealed yourself in your word, the Bible. Your revelation to us so that we might know you.

And Lord, we pray now that you will help us. Lord, help us to understand what you are saying to us.

Lord, help our minds to grasp the truths. Help our hearts to treasure them and to submit to them.

Lord, I pray for your help that I might speak clearly this morning. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Friends, the big idea of this passage is very simple.

[7 : 17] And that is that Jesus calls us to walk the way of the cross. We're going to look at this in two sections. Verse 34 is the call to walk the way of the cross.

And verse 35 through 38 is going to tell us about the shape of the way of the cross. So that's what we're going to do for those of you who are taking notes.

Each of our points will have three sub points. It'll break down really nicely. So, and hopefully we'll get through this and it will help bring clarity to us.

So in verse 34, Jesus calls us to walk in the way of the cross. Because of Peter's rebuke, Jesus recognizes, I need to clarify with these guys and not just with his disciples, but more broadly, he calls the crowd to him and says, I need to clarify what I have actually come to do.

And more importantly for, in this context, it's what it means to follow me. Right? Because this is the subject of what he's talking about throughout this. What does it mean to actually follow Jesus?

[8 : 25] And Jesus says, there are three things. If anyone would come after me, he must first deny himself. Now friends, this is a very simple, but very profound and difficult thing to do.

To say, it's not about me anymore. It's about something else outside of me. I have to deny that I am the center of the world.

I have to deny that I am the most important thing about me or about my life. To follow Jesus is to say, my life is no longer about me.

And of course, we know that this is how we enter into faith with Jesus, isn't it? Right? Recognizing that when we come to faith, what we're doing is recognizing, I have nothing to commend myself to God.

And my sin is so great that he is right to bring judgment upon me. And so I am undone. I have nothing by which I might cross this gulf between myself and a holy God.

[9 : 33] And yet that holy God has come and done something for me. But I need to recognize that the way to get to that thing, that person, Jesus, who has come for me, is by denying myself, surrendering my right, and clinging to him instead.

One commentator mentioned, noticed that denying oneself is not denying the things that the self wants, but it is denying the self itself.

Jesus calls for a deliberate refusal to be guided by self-interest, for a conscious surrender of control of one's life, for an intentional renunciation of self-determination.

Nothing in my hands I bring, only to the cross I cling. To deny oneself is to say, my life is no longer my own. I have surrendered it to Jesus in faith.

Jesus then says, not only are you to deny yourself, but you to pick up the cross. Now what does this mean? Fundamentally it means you need to embrace a path of suffering.

[10:49] Now, in the first century, what picking up the cross meant was, for those who were condemned to die by this horrific means of execution, they would be paraded through the streets, and they would be compelled to carry the crossbar of their cross, that then they would be nailed to when they were crucified and lifted up, and then hung there in public shame and humiliation, as well as unbelievable physical pain.

Right? This is what happened with Jesus. He was compelled to carry the cross. And Jesus says, we too need to recognize that we are called to walk in his footsteps, a path of suffering, a path of humiliation, in the eyes of others.

So Jesus says we're to deny ourselves, we're to pick up the cross, and then we're to follow him. And here's what I want you to see. This is, in some ways, the pattern of our salvation becomes the pattern of our life.

We follow Jesus who died for us by dying to ourselves so that we might live for him. And the life that we now live, we spend, not for ourselves, but for Jesus and for his glory.

This is the call that Jesus puts forth before us today. So what does it look like? Well, in some ways, the whole New Testament, all of the epistles and letters, and even much of the gospel teachings is teaching us about what does it look like to live in God's kingdom, to live this path that Jesus has laid out for us.

[12:50] But that would be too much for us today. Thankfully, Jesus gives us three things for us to think about very carefully as we think about what's the shape of this discipleship, this following Jesus that we're called to do.

The way of the cross looks like three things. It looks like dying to self-protection and giving your life away. It means dying to self-gratification and living for a greater good.

It means dying to self-identity, to be identified with Christ by faith. So we're going to look at those three things for a few minutes as we think about what's the shape.

Verse 35, the way of the cross means dying to self-protection and giving your life away for Christ. Look with me at the verse and see what he says. Right?

Verse 35, For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it. Now look, Jesus is using life in two different senses here.

[13:59] Right? Because at one level he's saying he's using life in the first one. Whoever would save his life, whoever would seek to save or preserve this earthly life, which means both your physical existence, but also all the things that you call your life.

Everything that it makes up. Your hopes, your dreams, all those things. Right? So he's saying, if you seek to save that, you'll never succeed. You will lose that.

But if you surrender your desire to protect, to save, to promote that and make your life about that, you will actually gain a different life, an eternal life that comes from me.

And this eternal life is, both in the present world and for eternity, something of greater value than you will ever know. But he says, you have to die to saving your life so that you might receive the life that I have for you.

You can't have both. You must give up one to gain the other. And he's saying, saving your life is futile.

[15:08] Now look, let's be very clear. Jesus is not advocating self-martyrdom, let alone suicide. He's not saying, go kill yourself so that you can have the life with Jesus. Right?

But what he is saying is, let go. Let go of your grasping, of your control, of your protecting, of this life. And again, friends, see, this is the pattern of Jesus.

Jesus had to die so that you could live. So now, he says, die to yourself, join yourself to me by faith, and you will live.

You will live for what? For me, and for the gospel's sake. This is the good news, right? Whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, this is something worth living for.

Worth giving up everything else to spend your energy and your life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

[16:18] So Jesus calls us to die to self-protection and to live for something else. Self-protection can take many forms. We might be obsessed with our physical life and health, desperately and fiercely, protecting it, promoting it, in a way that denies God's sovereignty over our physical strength

and weakness.

Maybe we do it not with our physical life, but with the life of our hopes and our dreams, in our careers, in our successes, in our relationships, our desire for pleasure or comfort.

At the center, we seek to preserve the life that we are making rather than allowing God to give us the life that he wants to give us. And Jesus calls us to do something else.

Jesus says, don't preserve, but give your life away. Let the cause of the gospel be the cause of your life. The apostle Paul talks about himself and his life as being poured out like a drink offering, simply given away before God for the sake of other people.

friends, in this Easter season, think about it. Who are the people that God has put in your life? Your family, your coworkers, your suite mates, your friends, your neighbors.

[17 : 47] What would it mean for you to love them the way Jesus has loved you? what would it cost you in your time, in your convenience, in your physical belongings, in your comfort zones, to love the people around you?

Pouring out your life for others is what Jesus did for us. All that I have and all that I am is completely given over to Jesus.

No halfway, no one foot in, one foot out. Either we save our life or we lose it. You may be familiar with the missionary Jim Elliott who in the 1950s was martyred.

He wrote in his life that he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose and he lived out that calling by going to an unreached tribe in South America who were known to be headhunters and he died at their hands.

Not only was his faith exemplary but his wife's faith. She who sat back at the radio and heard of his, heard of her husband's death and then after regrouping went back to the same people to love them.

[19 : 21] To raise her daughter as a single parent missionary so that they, these people who had done unspeakable harm to her family would know the grace and love of Christ.

Friends, if Jesus would ask you to give up something to follow him, would you do it? Would you do it gladly?

Can you think of that one thing that your hand is so grasped to that you're like the monkey in the jar you won't let go of it to get your hand out? Jesus says you must lose your life in order to save it.

But he goes on. He says the way of the cross is more than just thinking about our life. Verse 36 and 37 it's the way of the cross means dying to self-gratification and living for a greater good in Jesus.

Jesus uses these rhetorical, he turns from life to our good, the things that we value and esteem.

And he asks these two rhetorical questions. What does it profit one if they gain the whole world and they lose their soul?

[20 : 35] And because it's a rhetorical question we should know the answer. The answer is what does it gain? Nothing. We get nothing if we have the whole world all the riches all the power all the success all the accolades all the comfort.

If we have anything that we could dream of and we lose our soul what value does it have? Nothing.

And he asks a similar question. What can one give in return for the soul?

Nothing because the soul the part of us that is meant to commune with the eternal God our creator forever.

I'm not going to get into all the anthropology about soul and spirit and body and how that all fits together but Jesus uses this word and my translation used life right to save your life here right there is nothing.

Now look friends we need to be honest with one another. the world that we live in has a lot of allure and it promises a lot of goodness. In our physical life there is sex and gluttony and adrenaline highs and comfort beyond compare that we want and crave and long for.

[21 : 51] In our professional lives and in our societal lives we love for status the praise of others the pride of position the satisfaction of gaining a title.

in our world of physical means we love success the thrill of victory the pride of achievement the justification that our work is worth it because it's produced something good that I can point to and say that's what my life is worth that's what I have built.

and we have a world that says if you're looking for meaning look inside yourself find what's true about yourself your authentic reality whatever it is it's in you and in these things our souls crave something we believe that we can have a good apart from Jesus in them and they look shiny and attractive and we think and look here's the thing they give us something right they give us a short hit

they make us think in the moment hey this is great this is what I want but like an addict we find ourselves constantly disappointed it's never enough everything the world promises it's never gonna satisfy it's never gonna be the thing that your soul was made for Jesus says to follow me you must forsake gaining the things of this world in order to gain your soul so the apostle Paul in Philippians 3 says I count everything is lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord that I may know him and the power of his resurrection may share in his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead I found a great quote Helen Rosevere is a missionary I highly respect her life is amazing she spent 40 years doing medical missionaries in central Africa she suffered deeply for the gospel in some unspeakable ways she also lived she also lived a faithful life of singleness despite her desires otherwise to do so and yet at the very end of her time at the mission 40 years of service she was sidelined and excluded at the very end of her service she said Jesus really can I have the victory parade and this is what Jesus spoke to her heart you no longer want Jesus only but Jesus plus plus respect popularity public opinion success and pride you wanted to go out with all the trumpets blaring from a farewell that you organized for yourself with photographs and tape recordings to show and play at home just to reveal what you had achieved you wanted to feel needed and respected you wanted the other missionaries to be worried about how they'd ever carry on after you're gone you'd like letters when you go home to tell how much they realize they owe to you how much they miss you all this and more

Jesus plus no you can't have it either it must be Jesus only or you'll find you have no Jesus you'll substitute Helen Rosevere instead I can think of my friends two dear friends who I know graduates of the prestigious Harvard Law School I think I've spoken to them maybe to you before about them but they graduated from one of the top law schools in the world and they had the world before them but living for the kingdom for them living out these verses meant not living on two salaries but on one so that by careful budgeting they freed themselves up from debt within like three or four years taking one of their extensive salaries and putting it entirely towards debt reduction why?

[26 : 19] so that they could give freely to the church and so that they would be freed from the bondage of that to follow whatever God did and then God brought them a family and one of them stayed home and gave up their career to care for their children the other one moved from a prestigious law firm with all of the pomp and circumstance and the salary to an in-house corporate law job so that they could serve in their church so that they could be involved in the raising of their family so that they could and they've ended up serving as elders and deacons it's a very practical but profound way where someone looked at the world and said I don't want what you want that's going to take my soul away this is what Jesus calls us to forsaking the things that the world offers so that we might instead pursue the life that Jesus wants us to follow following him in the way of the cross giving up the things of the world so that we might gain him now if the way of the cross includes this dying to self preservation and this dying to self gratification the third thing

Jesus says is that the way of the cross means dying to self identity and being identified by faith in Jesus this is what verse 38 says to us why do I talk about identity here I don't see identity in the text right Jesus is talking about being ashamed but what Jesus is talking about is being publicly identified that is our identity publicly what other people know about us is being a follower of Christ now we've already talked about this the cross was the most shameful means of Roman persecution and oppression and execution it was not a symbol used in jewelry or used in pastel pictures with sheep in the background the cross was something ugly and scorned and shamed it would be like us carrying around an electric chair you know in our jewelry or identifying with one who said hey you know that guy who just died in the electric chair he's my hero he's the one who I follow I'm about him and Jesus that's what it is would have been like in the first century to say I identify with a crucified man but Jesus says if you are ashamed of me before men then you have no part of me and I will be ashamed of you at the end the cross was brutal it was public and it was meant to humiliate and shame those who were executed and when Jesus calls us to identify with him by faith to follow him it is to take that upon ourselves and be willing to say I am not ashamed of this man that the world is ashamed of how do we publicly identify it's a great Stephen Curtis Chapman song from the 90s about you know not t-shirts and bumper stickers and whatever but really it's true right how do we identify with

Jesus publicly it's not it's not with a hat or shirt or slogan but it's with the substance of who we are being presented to others how do we present ourselves to others what do you want what do I want

you to know about me above all is that my identity is found by being a follower of Christ and look this is a hard thing in our world today right for one thing our world presses in our identity is a huge thing and it's up to you have to figure it out you have to make it we have all these complex identities all these different roles and the world is saying make one of those your primary identity whatever it is and some of them are things that we inherit or that we we have have been born into some of them are things that we the world says you can choose what your identity is but either way they become our badge of honor this is what I want you to know about me above everything else and Jesus comes and says make your most fundamental identity that you know and follow me and it will cost you to do that in our world today people will scorn you and sneer at your foolishness in the academy they will dismiss you as not a serious thoughtful person some in our culture will hate you because of your bigoted perspectives because of your desire to oppress the freedom of other people some of them will laugh at you many of them will ignore you some will resist you to not be ashamed of Jesus may lead to others seeking to shame you

[31 : 56] Jesus says this is the way of the cross you cannot be ashamed of me and follow me you cannot deny yourself pick up your cross and follow me if you're not willing to be publicly identified and if you can't do that then you have no part of me you have no part of the salvation that I bring and in the last day when I bring come and bring all who are mine to glory the glory that the father's given me when I finally show up and establish my kingdom in all of its fullness which is still yet to come for us you will not be on the inside but you will be on the outside and I will say I have I don't know you friends are you ashamed of others knowing that you follow Jesus are you ashamed of his teachings are you afraid ashamed of his gospel

Jesus says this is what we're to expect when we follow him not a life of ease not a life of comfort not a life of unending and overcoming victory certainly Jesus does amazing things for us but what he calls us to is to deny ourselves pick up his cross walk in a path of suffering and follow him knowing that the reward that is in him and the treasure that we have in him is greater than anything we would seek to preserve or keep if we hold on to the things of this world the pattern of our salvation becomes the pattern of our life as we follow a savior who loved us so much that he left heaven and all the privileges and perks right he who was equal with

God did not count equality with God something to be grasped but humbled himself took on the form of a servant became a human being suffered and died on the cross for the salvation of people who didn't even know he had come for them this is the pattern this is the way that we follow because it was Jesus way and we know that he rose from the dead and we know that one day because he has risen from the dead being with him will mean we will be forever with him within the life that he has but let's look to Jesus let's look to Jesus and know that this is what it will mean to follow him let's pray together Lord Jesus we come to you now and we we hear this word and it is a word of challenge to us because we recognize our hearts our hearts are fickle so often we love other things more than we love you so often we are fearful of this world and in doing so we are ashamed of you Lord so often Lord rather than trusting you and walking in faith in the path that you have set Lord we seek to determine our own way God I pray right now by your Holy

Spirit Lord that you would reveal to us where this may be true in our own hearts and lives Lord I pray that as we see these things in our hearts that we might surrender them to you Lord I pray these things in Jesus name amen amen amen amen amen amen amen can please may please fish condescension or amen Dawg your c a amen