**Follow - The Cross Road of following Jesus - Mark 8:34-38**

**Pastor Ted has been leading us through the Gospel of Mark verse by verse with the focus of learning how to follow Jesus. We continue that focus today**

**Mark 8:31-38 (ESV) 31 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. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 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.” 34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 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.”**

**Review:**

1. **Following Jesus starts with a firm belief in who he is as God come in the flesh as the only savior of mankind (who do you say that I am?)**

* **That he alone is the eternal sovereign creator** of all that is and has the will and power to give eternal life.
* **That He is the Holy and righteous, good** God who will judge mankind for their sin against him but has taken action through Christ Jesus coming to earth in the flesh to provide forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father through paying the price for our sin through suffering death on the cross, so we could receive forgiveness and be reconciled to God and spend eternity with him in our glorified resurrected bodies if we put our full trust in Him.
* **That he alone is able to save us by his grace and** we cannot save ourselves and we need his salvation, or we will be condemned to an eternity separated from him and all of his goodness in an eternal hell.

**Satan exists and is hard at work with lies to draw mankind away from God’s salvation. He works through fear and hate and pain to try to defeat God’s purposes here.**

1. **Following Jesus is to set our minds on the things of God.**

Peter had made the mistake of believing that Jesus as messiah had to come in power to bring political and national salvation and peace, but that was not to be Jesus’ mission. Rather to suffer and die to build his kingdom of grace and love in the heart of mankind.

“**And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me”**

**Gracious invitation to all around him to follow and learn from him, but to be aware of the cost.**

The crowd was interested and amazed at Jesus’ miracles and looking for the benefits of following Jesus – likely misunderstanding his “light burden” - but not committed to the cost of following Him.

**“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** **– the cost of discipleship.**

**The Challenge - What did Jesus mean for one to “deny himself”?**

**Self-denial is** the letting go of self determination and renouncing the things of our old pattern of selfish living that we thought made life profitable. We no longer submit ourself to them, but instead replace them with obedience to, and dependence on Christ in the power of the Spirit.

**Self-denial is** not done by following the rules of the world, such as, “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”?...These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires. Col 2:2-23

**Take up your cross and follow me (taking up my cross)**

The cross was understood as an instrument of intense suffering and death. **“Take up your cross and follow Me”** means to “be willing to put to death our own self-will and interests to the point of being willing to die in order to follow Jesus like he took up his cross”.

**The Cross for Christ meant willingly taking on himself:**

* + - official opposition from the government and religious leaders
    - Shame and public ridicule.
    - Suffering willingly for the sins of others.
    - Death – giving His life willingly in submission to the Father’s will.

**The Motivation - to save our life (eternally)**

**Mark 8:35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it**

**If you try saving your life in this world and it's wisdom you will lose it.**

**If you lose your life by denying and dying to yourself for my sake and the Gospel’s you will save your life.**

**Your soul (or life) cannot be saved any other way then through Christ.**

**Mark 8:36-7For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37For what can a man give in return for his soul?  (2 rhetorical questions to be answered with a statement).**

**Question 1: what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**

It is worthless or vain, to put your trust and hope in saving your soul through anything and everything that the world thinks valuable. In doing so, you will forfeit or lose your soul in hell.

**Question 2: for what can a man give in return for his soul?**

A man can give nothing in return for his soul a soul cannot be redeemed or purchased from hell. No amounts of good works and no other savior can keep one from losing their soul. All the world would seem to offer as valuable will not be sufficient to redeem my soul. In the end I forfeit my soul.

**The Sacrifice - being Ashamed of Christ and the Gospel means loss.**

**Mark 8:38 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.” [Matt 16:27 adds, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. “**

**Being ashamed of Christ means first of all that one believes that his death and resurrection is not really of value for life and eternal life – it’s foolishness or insufficient – there has to be another way according to world’s “wisdom”. It implies pleasing/conforming to culture more value then following and pleasing Christ. This person will have no part in Christ’s Kingdom and thus will have the loss of eternal life**

**Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,**

**The invitation – and the cost of following Jesus - “come follow me”**

**Invitation to those willing to follow Jesus is to learn from him in his suffering.**

**Following Jesus is not a trite or half-hearted thing with the mind set half on the world and half on seeking God.**

Like the many in the crowd who followed Jesus, many today are only following Christ from man’s mind set – willing to follow if there is some earthly benefit.

**“Somewhere along the line we have made the gospel making us get something from God, instead of us seeking to be transformed by God. We have made it all about being blessed instead of being changed. That the Gospel is serving you, not transforming you….” (Dan Mohler).**

Our motive in following Jesus has to be more than just going to heaven; or for receiving his caring provision and providing for our personal comfort and survival and safety - instead of how he lives in and through us

**His gracious invitation is**

“**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28.**

**Following Jesus is to know Him and his power thru suffering –**

**“that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,** **that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”**

**What is your response to his invitation?**

**Where is your mind set in regard to following Christ?**

**The Example - How do we live out following Jesus?**

**Learning from His example: (slide 11)**

* **Totally reliant on the Father** and fully surrendered to His will.

He lived a life of faith and absolute trust in the Father in the power of the Spirit even unto death on the cross

* **Jesus lived a life of love.** He loved his Father with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. And he loved others by giving his life for them and always sought their eternal good.
* **He humbled himself and served others** more than himself and associated with the outcasts and the lowly.

He demonstrated a life “full of grace and truth” yet moved in righteous anger to those who would mislead or take advantage of others in the name of His Father.

* **Following Jesus, then, entails hearing and obeying his teachings and imitating his example.** But obeying and imitating are not ends in themselves but are means to a greater end. That end or goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus himself: to think as he thought, to feel as he felt, to act as he acted, desire what he desired.

**Following Jesus in denying self through God's grace and power.**

**Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**

**2 Peter 1:3-5 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us and becoming partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.**

**Col 3:1-3 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your[a] life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**

**Putting to death what is earthly and put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator…. Compassionate hearts…forgiving others… above all put on love.**

**Following him by willingly taking up our cross of suffering in faith because of His loving sacrifice:**

**Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

**Learning to take up our cross by faith**

1. **Embracing the life of the cross of Christ**

* **Willing to** stand fast under governmental and religious opposition and hatred of Christ
* **Willing to** take on shame (Gospel is foolishness to the world)
* Willingness to endure suffering caused by the sins of others in the love of Christ – extend mercy and forgiveness
* Death – **willing to** die - trusting our life to the will of the Father with a living hope of life eternal. The life of the natural man needing to die
* Pursue acceptance and conformity over opposition
* Pursue Self glory and earthly honor – not shame
* Pursue comfort and avoid suffering
* Pursue safety and not putting life at risk – striving to live as long as possible because this is all there is to life.

**Compare and give a couple of current examples**

**2. Following Christ is possible when Empowered by the holy Spirit**

It is only through the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can obey the teaching of Jesus and follow his example. He assures us of the Father’s love, he makes the things of Christ real to us; he makes the gospel precious to us; he convicts us of sin and assures of forgiveness when we repent; he transforms us from glory to glory, into the likeness of Jesus **(2 Cor. 3:16–18).**

That is why we are taught to earnestly seek to be filled with the Spirit each day **(Eph. 5:18)** and to be led by him in all our ways **(Gal. 5:16–25).** When we do, we will find that we can live in newness of life. Not perfectly and not immediately. But day by day, as we walk in faith and obedience, the Spirit will produce in us the character of Jesus: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” **(Gal. 5:22–23)** (taken from gotquestions.com)

**In summary, What does it mean to follow Jesus? (slide 15)**

**Following Jesus, entails hearing and obeying his teachings and imitating his example. But obeying and imitating are not ends in themselves but are means to a greater end. That end or goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus himself: to think as he thought, to feel as he felt, to act as he acted, desire what he desired. As John puts it, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (CS Lewis)**

**Questions to be considered with Prayer:**

1. **Are you willing and desiring to being serious about following Christ – to be fully committed?**
2. **Can you in faith in his provision of grace and power be committed fully to Christ - taking up your cross daily, giving up your hopes, dreams, possessions, even your very life if need be for the sake of Christ and the Gospel?**

**If you wonder if you are ready to take up your cross, consider this:**

• Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of your friends?

• Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from your family?

• Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of reputation & approval?

• Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your job?

• Are you willing to follow Jesus if it means losing your life?

**Only if you willingly deny your old self will and take up your cross may you be called His disciple. The reward is worth the price. Jesus followed His call of death to self (“Take up your cross and follow Me”) with the gift of life eternal in Christ.**

**Where is your mind set – on the things of this world, or on God and the reward of eternal life with Him?**

**(CLOSE with this verse on the screen).**

**If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory**