

Introducing the Cross -- Mark 8:27-38

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Lord, we are here today because we believe that Your Son, Jesus of Nazareth, is indeed the Savior of the world. As we open Your Word, may we see Him as the solution to all of our problems, the answer to all our questions. In His name we ask these things, amen.

Today's story reminds me of when I was self-employed as a carpenter. A homeowner would show me what they wanted done on their house. It might be a large project such as building an addition. Or it might just be framing in some attic space or replacing some rotted fascia board. With each customer I would start by giving them an estimate. Before I would do any work for them I would say, "Here's what it will cost for me to do the work you want done." Before we signed a contract, I showed them what the expense would be. They decided if it was worth that much.

Today we will see how Jesus gave His disciples an estimate. He told them what it was going to cost for them to remain as His disciples.

Let's begin with a summary of our story:

While on their way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus questioned His disciples concerning His identity. They responded by saying that while the people saw Him as a prophet, they believed Him to be the Messiah. Jesus then began to disclose to them His approaching death and resurrection. Peter responded by taking Him aside and rebuking Him. But Jesus interrupted him with a cutting rebuke. He then revealed that anyone who wanted to follow Him would endure the same humiliation as Him. Whoever refused to do so would in fact end up losing everything.

Let's begin by considering what Jesus experienced in this story. It is found in Mark 8:27-38. It is page 891 in your pew Bibles, so you can follow along if you would like. First, Jesus experienced calling for a confession. This takes place while Jesus and His disciples were on the way to Caesarea Philippi. This was a town located approximately 25 miles north of Bethsaida, where Jesus has just come from. The religious leaders of the Jews have been trying to bring an end to His ministry. Each time He has gone back to their territory, they have confronted Him. They have sent spies to follow Him. And yet as Jesus goes north to Caesarea Philippi, He finds a place where His spies will not follow. This area is filled with the heathen and idol worship, and so here Jesus finally finds some seclusion. This town, Caesarea Philippi, was built by Philip the Tetrarch, one of Herod the Great's sons. We have already talked some about Philip's brother, Herod the Tetrarch. Philip named this city Caesarea Philippi in honor of the Caesar Tiberius and of himself. In fact, in the original Greek this city is "Caesarea of Philipp".

Mark 8:27 mentions that as Jesus and His disciples were en route to Caesarea Philippi, He posed to them a question – "Who do men say that I am?" In other words, "What are they saying about Me?" The disciples answered by saying that some believed He was John the Baptist who had been raised from the dead. We already considered how King Herod believed this. The disciples also mentioned that some believed that Jesus was Elijah raised from the dead. Others believed Him to be another prophet sent from God. Jesus then directed the same question to His disciples – "But who do you say that I am?" Or in other words, "What about you? What do you think?" Here Jesus was giving His disciples an opportunity to confess their faith. And that's exactly what Peter did. He responded by saying, "You are the Christ." Certainly Peter was not the only disciple who believed this. He was simply acting, as he often did, as the spokesman for the group.

Mark 8:30 says that Jesus then "charged them to tell no one about Him." The word translated "charged", actually means to "rebuke" or "to give a severe warning". Why is Jesus so severe in His prohibition? Why doesn't He want the disciples telling people that He is, in fact, the Christ? If they would have told everyone, people would have been given false ideas of what Jesus had come to do. Their ideas of the Messiah's mission

were far from what Jesus had actually come to do. He had not come to set up a physical kingdom in Jerusalem. He came to establish God's kingdom in people's hearts.

Second, Jesus experienced revealing His future. He had been trying to prepare His disciples for this revelation. He knows it will be a heavy blow to them. He has just called forth a confession from them to prepare them for this trial. He knew what He was about to say would test their faith in Him. Jesus begins in Mark 8:31 by saying, "the Son of Man must suffer many things...." He must. In other words, there was no other way. It was necessary for Him to suffer many things. Surely, His suffering would be far beyond what anyone had experienced before. Jesus continued, saying, "and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes...." These three groups comprised the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and legislative body in Judaism. They had a strong influence on the disciples as they did all Jews. The disciples kept hoping that somehow Jesus would be accepted by them. And yet here Jesus destroys all their hopes. He makes it clear that their hatred would never be overcome. He would be rejected by their own nation. As if that was not enough, Jesus continued, saying, "and be killed and after three days rise again." Jesus spoke of both His death and resurrection. But it is unlikely that they heard anything past the "be killed" part. How could He who had raised the dead be killed? Mark says in verse 32 that "He spoke this word openly." In other words He was very candid. He spoke plainly of His sufferings and death. He had referred to His death previously in metaphorical language. On one occasion He had declared that He would be three days in the heart of the earth. But now He is very open with them about His future.

Next, Jesus experienced rebuking the enemy. The disciples are devastated by Jesus' revelation of His future. Peter acts out what the others are most likely feeling and thinking. Mark 8:32 says that "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him." Peter gets Jesus alone before he begins to correct Him. It reminds us of how Satan took advantage of Jesus being alone in the wilderness. There Satan told Jesus that He didn't have to go through all the suffering and death. "Just bow down to me!" he said. Jesus rejected such a temptation then and He does so now. In fact, He interrupted Peter's rebuke. No sooner had Peter begun to rebuke Him than Jesus "turned around (away from Peter) and looked at His (other) disciples." (verse 33) What Jesus is about to say is directed at His real enemy. And yet He wants all twelve of His disciples to hear. Mark 8:33 says, "He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan!'" A more modern translation might be, "Get out of my sight!" Or, "Get back where you belong!" His words seem even more severe than when Satan approached Jesus in the wilderness. Perhaps it is because of jealousy for His disciples, who have inadvertently been used by and taken hostage by Satan. The disciples' false ideas of the Messiah and their desires for worldly acceptance had given Satan an open door. Jesus' words, "For you are not mindful of the things of God but the things of men", seemed directed to Satan as well as the disciples. They are a particular rebuke to Peter.

Last of all, Jesus experienced calling for true discipleship. Jesus followed up His rebuke with what it really means to be one of His disciples. The disciples had witnessed Jesus performing lots of miracles. They had seen how His teaching had drawn large crowds of people. They had been excited to be a follower of One who was so popular. And yet Jesus now reveals that there is more to be His disciple. In Mark 8:34 Jesus declares that anyone who wanted to follow Him would need to "deny himself". This word means to "disown". When Peter denied Jesus, he was, in essence, disowning Him. "I don't know who that is!" he would later say. And so a true disciple of Jesus disowns himself. They must look at their own hearts of sin and self-centeredness and say, "I don't know who you are!" Jesus then gives a graphic picture of this self-denial. Mark 8:34 continues, "and take up your cross and follow Me." The cross was a Roman instrument of torture and death. It was reserved for the slaves and most hated criminals. Each person, who was sentenced to crucifixion on a cross by the Romans, was required to pick up their own cross or at least the cross bar. As they walked to their place of execution, carrying their cross, they endured much shame. They endured the frowns of their own friends and family. They endured cries of hatred from the crowds, who despised them. Jesus is picturing true discipleship as a path of humiliation. He would, in less than one year, carry His own cross to Calvary. And Jesus declares that to be His disciple means to follow Him in this path of humiliation. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not a road to popularity with the world.

Jesus knew this picture of discipleship was repulsive to His twelve disciples and certainly anyone else who would have been listening. And so He continues by giving three persuasive arguments in an effort to pull His

disciples in. First of all, He stated that the path of humiliation is the only way to live. In Mark 8:35 Jesus states that "whoever desires to save his life will lose it." Living for the interests and desires of self is deadly. There is a powerful quote in the book Desire of Ages by Ellen White. It is very cutting: "Selfishness is death." Then she gives the example of the body. What if the heart lived only for itself? What if it only circulated the blood within itself? What would happen? The body would quickly die. In the same way, Jesus' first argument in favor of the life of self-denial is that it is the only way to life. To live for self is to lose your life.

Jesus' argument reveals that nothing is worth more than life. In Mark 8:36 and 37 He asks two rhetorical questions. (Read) In other words, "What good would it do you to gain all that the world has to offer if you're going to lose your life? What would be worth trading in for it?" If I have an old clunker car that is a gas-guzzler, I would be happy to trade it in for a new car that gets 40 miles to the gallon. But if the car salesman asked me to trade in my eternal life in heaven, I wouldn't even think about it! Jesus says, "What fame and fortune is worth trading in your life for?" Surely, the path of self-denial that leads to life is the better way to go!

Jesus' third argument reveals that not choosing the path of humiliation is to lose everything. Notice what Jesus says in Mark 8:38. (Read) Jesus looks at His disciples and says, "If you don't follow Me in My humiliation, you'll lose everything! When I come back the second time as King of kings and Lord of lords, I will act like I don't even know you. When I come in all My Father's glory with thousands and thousands of angels, I'll be ashamed of you!" What could be worse than that?

Truly, Jesus' arguments were very persuasive. And yet it is unlikely that the disciples received much benefit. They were still in shock at Jesus' revelation of this path of humiliation. They didn't want to hear anything of the sort.

Let's now consider how this story reveals Jesus as our example. As we see Him, in our minds' eye, how does He reveal what a healthy and dangerous Christian is? One way in which Jesus is revealed in this story as our example is that He used persuasion, not a cover-up. He could have only revealed the things that would have made Him popular. Up to this point the disciples had seen Jesus perform a lot of miracles and gain a lot of popularity. These were things that appealed to them. And Jesus could have focused on these things. He could have covered up all the "unattractive things". But He didn't do this. He told them about His coming humiliation and death. He told them about His resurrection and even the Second Coming. He revealed it all. He didn't cover anything up. Instead, He was very candid. And then He responded to their distress by using persuasion.

And so Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian is someone who tells the whole gospel story. I invite you to turn with me to Galatians 6:14. This is a letter from Paul to the church in a town called Galatia. (Read) Paul here pictures the ultimate attraction – Jesus dying on the cross for me. The love that Jesus displayed on the cross is the strongest persuasion to follow Him. It is the greatest force in the world. When Paul realized that Jesus was made a curse, not for His own sin, but his sin, it grabbed him. He says, "I will not brag about any of my own accomplishments. I will proclaim the cross of Jesus Christ to the whole world!" And yet Paul realized that in choosing Christ, he was losing the world. He says, "the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." In other words, "The world and I no longer have anything in common." In turning to Jesus he was turning away from the world and what it offers. He chose Christ INSTEAD OF fame and fortune. He made it clear that you can't have both. He told the whole story.

Second of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in that He identified His real enemy. Jesus responded to Peter's rebuke by first addressing Satan. And even in His rebuke, He didn't just single out Peter. He looked at the other eleven disciples, too. Jesus knew the faith and love that was in Peter's heart. Peter had just declared that he believed that Jesus was the Christ. Peter had left everything to follow Him. And so Jesus responded to Peter's rebuke by sending Satan away, not Peter.

And so Jesus reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who knows their enemy. Not long after Cesilia and I got married we attend a marriage conference called "A Weekend to Remember". The presenter was talking about how to work together instead of against each other. He had all the spouses look

at each other and say, "You are not my enemy." It was a memorable moment. Thousands of people have been through the same marriage conference across the United States, and this would have to be one of moments that almost everyone would remember. In fact, a couple who was a friend of ours had gone through the same conference. And they told us about this part of the presentation. It had been years ago, and yet it was still clearly in their minds. The person I married is not my enemy. I might feel like it sometimes when I'm hurt or offended. But the enemy is the one trying to tear our marriage apart!

You've probably heard the saying, "With friends like that who needs enemies?" Sometimes we can be pretty nasty towards those we love the most. When we have feelings of anger and hatred towards our spouse or a brother or sister in the church, we need to stop and ask ourselves, "Who's making me feel like this? Who's trying to tear us apart?" Satan and everyone on his side are our real enemies. A healthy Christian is dangerous to Satan and all evil, not to those in their own families and churches.

I find it very telling that in our story today Jesus refers to Himself at the Second Coming as the "Son of Man". Even after His resurrection. Even after being exalted to the highest place in heaven. He will one day come back, still being the "Son of Man". Even though He will be the King of kings and Lord of lords, He will still be human. Jesus' commitment to lay aside His place in heaven was an eternal commitment. The sacrifice He made has eternal results. He will never be who He was. And He knew all this before He laid aside His place in heaven. Before He came to this earth, He had already counted the cost. He fully knew the sacrifice He was making.

He wants us to count the cost, too. He wants us to realize that choosing Him comes at a cost. Probably two of the things that we are most loathe to give up our control and pride. We have an inner desire to be in control of our own lives. We don't like feeling out of control. To let God determine the agenda for my life is hard. To let God lay my self-glory in the dust is not easy. To walk in the path of humility is a cost that Jesus requires. There is no other way. Are we willing to pay the price. Jesus is very clear and candid with us. He gives us an estimate and says, "This is what it will cost you to become My disciple." Are you willing to pay the cost? Are you willing to say, "Take the world. Just give me Jesus"? If you are, I invite you to stand as we sing our closing hymn of consecration, "Take the World, But Give Me Jesus".