

The Gospel According to Jesus (Part 1)

Mark 8:34

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Introduction

Mark 8:34 *When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

This is the heart of Jesus' teaching. This is the "pearl of great price." This is the heart and soul of Mark's gospel. He is writing to Christians who are undergoing persecution, and he reminds them that by following Jesus, the cost is high. This statement is a promise made by the Lord Himself. This is a call to self-denial and self-sacrifice. This is the gospel according to Jesus.

Today, many churches tell people to follow Jesus because He loves them and has a wonderful plan for them. The church services are designed to boost the self-esteem and provide comfort and avoid offending others. In order to draw the crowds, the church turns to entertainment to please all types of people. They have become seeker-sensitive. They reason that if they make themselves so attractive, then there is a high chance that someone will be saved. They think they are reaching the people that other churches cannot reach. However, all these methods cater to the flesh.

Mark 4:16-19 *These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. ¹⁸Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, ¹⁹and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

John Stott said in Basic Christianity that

The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict half-built towers. The ruins of those who began to build them were unable to finish for thousands of people still ignore Christ's warning and undertake to follow Him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called nominal Christianity. In countries in which Christian civilization has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent but thin veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from hard unpleasantness of life while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.

What has happened is that we are so concerned about offending people that we tell people that all they have to do is believe in Jesus and everything will be alright. This is a far cry from what Jesus explains to the disciples. In fact, take what Jesus says in many of those churches, then people will leave because they are offended by such message. They do not want to get rid of their comfort. We are not in the entertainment business. We are not professionals. We are not to attract sinners with honey and lead them to a broad path of destruction. We are to preach the truth, and the truth costs so much. Jesus' comment is the model for all invitations. It is the way to heaven to everlasting joy and peace.

I. The Context

- Peter's confession
 - High point of the disciples' understanding of Jesus
 - They finally recognized Him as Messiah and the Son of God
 - No doubt in their minds of who He is
- God's Plan
 - Jesus warns them not to tell anyone
 - Why?
 - ½ the message: ½ involves Jesus as the person and ½ involves His plan
 - They failed to understand and accept His plan
 - He planned to be captured by religious leaders
 - He planned to suffer
 - He planned to die
 - He would raise again 3 days later
 - Jesus told them plainly and clearly
- The rebukes
 - Peter rebukes Jesus
 - The disciples could not accept Him dying because
 - They believed that Messiah would make the physical Israel great
 - All would be paradise and blessings
 - Peter tries to correct Jesus' plan!
 - Jesus rebukes Peter
 - Peter wanted a satanic kingdom—one without any suffering
 - God requires the cross
 - "I'm going to suffer and die, but I will rise again 3 days later"
- Open invitation

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me

- Jesus turns to the crowd and to the disciples
- You want to follow Me? This is what you need to do!

II. Denying Self

let him deny himself

- Deny yourself
 - Very strong expression
 - Refuse to associate with yourself
 - I'm fed up with everything about my sinful self
 - I hate myself and **cannot do anything** to please God
 - Rejecting self

Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

- Poor in spirit = spiritual beggar; spiritual bankrupt

Luke 18:9-13 *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a*

Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ¹³And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'"

- The true reality of the heart
 - Sees only the garbage of sin—all the filthiness and ugliness
 - If you think you have something good in you...consider Paul

Philippians 3:4-8 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

- When we deny ourselves, God changes us!

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 66:2 This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word.

- The high cost of denying self

Note: The proud sinner wants Christ and his sins / pleasures / immorality. Jesus demands that we sacrifice everything.

- Follow Me and you can lose everything

Luke 9:57-62 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." ⁵⁹Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." ⁶¹And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." ⁶²But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

- Following Jesus means to give up everything and desperately grab Him

Matthew 13:44-46 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

- Counting the cost

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- When we deny ourselves
 - When neglected on purpose, set aside and insulted—our heart is happy and happy to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ
 - People speak evil of you or ridicule you—you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or refuse to defend yourself, but to be patient, loyal and silent
 - Can receive correction from someone who is of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit inward and outward with no rebellion or resent in your heart
 - See another brother or sister prosper and have their needs met—honestly rejoice with them in spirit and have no envy and do not question God when your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances

Note: Our self-denial is not perfect. We bring back up our egos and our own wills and intrude these into the will of God. When we do that we have to seek His grace and forgiveness. In spite of our shortcomings, this is the desire of our redeemed heart, even though it is far short from where we want to be.

III. Picking up the Cross

take up his cross

- The cross
 - Does not mean our struggles—“_____ is a cross to bear”
 - Cross with the disciples meant painful, torturous death
 - Common in Roman empire—daily visible
 - Jesus is saying you must be willing to experience this willingly
 - Luke adds “daily”
 - This is extreme devotion to Jesus Christ
 - For us to possess Jesus Christ—I must be willing to die!
 - This is not a “Jesus loves you, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life” invitation
 - You may be killed in following Me
 - I have said no to self and now I say no to safety
- What is involved in carrying the cross daily
 - Accepting the consequence of following Jesus

John 15:18-20 If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

- This world is hostile to Christians
- I do not live anymore

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

IV. Following Jesus

and follow Me.

- Continual pattern
 - You be following Me
 - Basically, you become His disciple—His follower

John 14:21 *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*

John 15:10, 14 *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*

- Consistent pattern of obedience
- Doers of the Word
- Imitating Jesus

1 John 2:6 *He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

- Components of saving faith
 - This is not in chronological order
 - This is saving faith with all its components
 - People do not respond to this at all apart from the prompting of the Holy Spirit
 - This is not something we can do on our own—we are powerless
 - When we share the message—nobody will respond on their own, but the Holy Spirit will prompt them, shattering their own hearts to receive God's gift
 - WE preach the truth

Conclusion

How valuable is this gift? Is this valuable enough that you would deny your own worldly pleasures, needs, and comfort for the sake of Christ and the gospel? Is it valuable enough that you would give up everything even to the point of death? Is this valuable enough to do on a daily basis? This is the true gospel of Jesus, and He demands your soul, your life and your all.