

2026-02-15

The Paradox of Life

Mark 8:34-38

There should come a time in our lives when we need to sit down and have a serious talk about life, death and eternity, about what is important, about what is at stake with those people who are most important to us. That time had come for Jesus and His disciples along with the crowd of people that is following Him. Jesus' time on earth is quickly coming to an end. As I said last week, at this place in Mark, Jesus has about 6 months before His crucifixion. These verses finish chapter 8. Chapters 9 and 10 cover about 5 ½ months. Chapter 11 begins the last week of Jesus life with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. **We call it Palm Sunday.** Mark has 5 chapters that cover the last 6 days of Jesus life on earth. He finished his gospel with one chapter on the resurrection of Jesus. What we have in these last verses of Mark 8 is a summary statement of the long, detailed talk Jesus had with this crowd and His disciples about the cost of following Jesus, the cost of being His disciple and the consequences of our choice.

Everything that Jesus has said, taught and done up to this point in His ministry was to reveal to everyone who listened to Him and saw Him that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. No one believed Him. Everything Jesus said and did was the exact will of the Father (John 5:30). Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was fulfilling all prophecies concerning Him (Mark 14:49 / Luke 24:27). Jesus asked the disciples who people thought He was. They saw Him as a prophet, like Elijah or John the Baptist or some other prophet (Mark 8:27-28). They did not see Him as the Messiah. The sad part is the disciples did not correct the people because they themselves really did not know or they did not have the confidence to correct the people. When Jesus confronted His disciples about who He was, Peter made the confession, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Jesus confirmed this truth to Peter by telling Him God the Father in heaven has revealed this knowledge to him (16:17). Since Jesus is the Messiah, our Savior, everyone who believes this should follow Him completely and totally. We are not following just some great man. Nor are we following just any god. We are following the One True Living God, our Creator and Redeemer. What does it mean to follow Jesus? What does it mean to be His disciple?

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.’”* Jesus called all people to Himself. He called the Jews. He called the Gentiles. He called the Pharisees. He called His disciples. No one is

left out of the invitation. Everyone is welcome to hear the voice of Jesus and respond to His call in their life. Crowds of people responded to Jesus. They came to Him with their self-desires. They came to Him with their own wants and demands (John 6:15). They came to Him with their own expectations. Jesus called them to **come after Him**. He wanted people to follow His instructions, believe His teachings, and enter into fellowship with Him the way He wants it to happen. Jesus does not give people a choice to accept and believe some of the things He teaches and reject the teachings they do not like. This is not about picking and choosing what you want to believe and disregard the rest. No, Jesus calls us to accept and believe all that He teaches (John 14:23-24). Jesus knows who His real followers are. He said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 10:27).

What does it mean to follow Jesus? What does it mean to be His disciple? It begins with **denying ourselves** our own way we live our life. It begins by denying the way we want to believe and act in this world. **There is a cost to following Jesus**. If you desire to follow Jesus, He demands that we deny our self-interests and carry the hardest most difficult burden in this wicked world we live in. We die to our own self-interests and we live to do the will of Jesus. We make the priorities that Jesus had our priorities. What priorities did Jesus have? Making disciples, teaching the truth in love, showing compassion to others. We accompany Jesus so that He can fulfill His tasks through us. Do you know the interesting thing that happens when we truly delight ourselves in the Lord? He gives us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). Those same desires we were seeking on our own, by ourselves are now reformatted. They are put in the right order when we put Jesus first in our lives. One of the things Jesus constantly did towards people was show them compassion. Jesus wants us to show compassion to those who love us and those who hate us. This compassion is not doing what the people want us to do for them. It is doing what God wants us to do as His followers to influence the lives of those around us for the kingdom of God.

Verse 35 “*For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.*” **Jesus gives everyone a choice**. We can desire to come after and follow Jesus or we can desire to save our own life. Either we recognize that Jesus is the only One who can save our life or we are attempting to save our own life. **We cannot do both or have both**. If you think you can save your life on your own, if you think you can be good enough to get yourself into heaven, if you can earn your own way or any way you want to phrase this, Jesus said you will lose your life. Even if you think God needs your help, your goodness to save your life, at the end of your life you will find out that you will lose eternal life. **If you chose to follow Jesus, you will receive eternal life**. But understand, if you chose to follow Jesus, you must deny yourself. You must deny believing that your

good works will save you. You must stop believing that any goodness you do will earn you a place in heaven. Every time you think you can save yourself, stop that thought and correct it by teaching yourself the truth. Only Jesus can save me. He died on the cross for my sins. His sacrifice saves me. You must take up your cross. Our cross includes believing that our salvation only comes through the gospel of Jesus, His death on His cross and His resurrection from the dead. Our cross includes trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. Our cross includes teaching others that they cannot save themselves. Our cross includes teaching others that only trusting in the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins is the only way to gain eternal life. Our cross includes showing compassion to a lost world.

Verse 36 *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”* How much of this material world do you **have**? None of us have very much. How much of this material world do you **want**? Most people seem to want more than they currently have. How much of this material world is **enough**? What if you could gain the whole material world? Satan tempted Jesus. *“The devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these I will give You if You will fall down and worship me’”* (Matthew 4:8-9). **The only way anyone could gain the whole material world is if the devil made it happen.** This will change when Jesus returns. And if the devil made it happen for you, you would be sold out to the devil and you would lose your soul. Even if you recognized your mistake and offered God the whole material world for your salvation, the value of the material world is not enough for your soul. **Live is always more valuable than the material world**, even the life of a sparrow. We *“are of more value than many sparrows”* (Matthew 10:31). Our soul is very precious to God. *“He has put eternity in (our) hearts”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11). All the material world will be destroyed one day (2 Peter 3:10 / Revelation 21:1). But our soul will live on. God is not willing for any soul to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But He will not override your choice. You can choose to come after Jesus and follow Him or you can choose to save your own life, which will only end up with losing your soul. The choice is still yours to make.

Verse 37 *“Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* Denying yourself by itself will not get you eternal life. Religions teach self-denial. Denying yourself does not make you a child of God. What makes a person a child of God is coming after Jesus, following Jesus, trusting in Jesus. But to think a person can follow Jesus without having to deny yourself and take up your cross is the same as trying to save your own life while trying to follow Jesus. **You cannot do both.** The only exchange for your soul is the sacrifice of Jesus. His life for your life. Self-denial alone is not enough. Salvation from sin and eternal life is only found in Jesus and His way.

Verse 38 “*For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*” You might think this an odd statement but it is not. When a person makes the choice to follow Jesus in an adulterous and sinful generation, they will be hated by the world. The world hates those who follow Jesus. God loves those who follow Jesus. The sins of the world are exposed by those who follow Jesus. God exposes our sins when we follow Jesus. We confess those sins. We turn away from those sins and we receive the mercy and grace of Jesus. God forgives us. **We should not be ashamed of this truth.** How we live our lives daily shows the world and it shows God who we believe in and who we follow. Do not be ashamed of who Jesus is, what He has done for us or the truths that Jesus teaches. Let your light shine so that others “*may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).

Jesus promised to come back to this earth. One day He will come back. When will He return? I do not know, but we are one day closer to His return. We could be alive when He returns. Make the choice to come after Jesus, to follow Him. Make the choice to deny yourself. Choose to believe God’s revelation and His word. Take up your cross and follow Jesus. Live the way Jesus has taught us to live. Do not be ashamed to do the will of God and follow His teachings. Make the priorities of Jesus your priorities. Jesus is coming back in great glory with His holy angels. May He find us living for Him in this sinful world.

John wrote, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever*” (1 John 2:15-17).

Questions to ask yourself: What choice have you made? Have you chosen to save yourself or have you chosen to let Jesus save you?

Actions to take: Learn to deny yourself and follow Jesus. Learn to take up your cross and bear the shame of Jesus in this sinful world.

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