

**“What’s Your Desire?”**  
**The Gospel According to Mark 8:31-38**  
May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018

\* *Did you hear that NASA recently put a bunch of Holsteins into low earth orbit? They called it the herd shot 'round the world.*

\* *Two boll weevils grew up in Alabama. One went to Hollywood and became a famous actor. The other stayed behind in the cotton fields and never amounted to much. The second one, naturally, became known as the lesser of two weevils.*

\* *A woman has twins, and gives them up for adoption. One of them goes to a family in Egypt and is named "Amal." The other is adopted by a family in Spain; they name him "Juan." Years later, Juan sends a picture of himself to his birth mother. Upon receiving the picture, she tells her husband that she wishes she also had a picture of Amal. Her husband responds, "They're twins! If you've seen Juan, you've seen Amal."*

Picking up on the conversation He initiated with His disciples in the section of Scripture we looked at last Sunday (**Mark 8:27-30**), Jesus shared what the Old Testament Scriptures foretold about the Messiah (“Anointed One”). Using a line from one of the puns I just shared with you, “If you’ve seen Jesus, you’ve seen the Messiah!”

Today, we close our study of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s gospel account by studying the last 7 verses (**Mark 8:31-38**). “The primary purpose of this section is to explain what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah and what it requires to be identified with Him.” (Lane, 292-93)

To this point, the disciples weren’t yet ready to accept all that Scripture foretold of the Messiah’s coming from heaven to earth. In **Mark 8:29**, Peter correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah. In **Mark 8:30**, Jesus instructs His followers not to tell anyone else. Their understanding was incomplete without the revelation He shares with them in today’s passage of Scripture.

**The Gospel According to Mark 8:31-38:**

<sup>31</sup> And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. <sup>33</sup> But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”

<sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> 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.”

These verses begin a new section in Mark’s gospel account which continues through the end of **Mark Chapter 10**. From this point to that one, Jesus’ work on earth becomes clearer to the disciples. This current passage has two parts. The first part, verses 31-33, **traces the Messiah’s purpose** in coming to earth.

This is sometimes called His “Passion.” Perhaps you’ve heard of ‘Passion Plays’ which portray the last days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The most famous is in Oberammergau, Bavaria, Germany, which has hosted a series of Passion plays every 10 years since 1634! The English word ‘Passion’ stems from the Latin word *pati*, which means, “to suffer.” Thus it refers to the suffering of Christ on the cross.

*What was Jesus’ purpose in leaving the glories of heaven for the sin and depravity of this world?* “To some He would be a glorious king who, with Jerusalem as His throne, would reestablish the theocratic nation of Israel. To many He would be a military Messiah Who would come and kill the Roman oppressors. What these differing dreams all held in common was the notion of glory, victory and divine power. Above all, the Messiah would never submit, surrender, or suffer.” (Card, 111)

The passage opens with Jesus teaching His followers the core doctrine of His sacrificial death on the cross and subsequent burial in a tomb. For the third time in Mark, Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man.” The first two times “Son of Man” referred to the authority He had to forgive sins (Mark 2:10), as well as establishing Him as Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28).

In chapters 8-10, Jesus uses the term three more times, once for each chapter. As such, Jesus prophesies about His arrest, sentencing, death, and resurrection. He says He must “suffer many things,” He must be rejected by Jewish religious leadership, and, finally, He must die. A suffering servant was not what Peter and his fellow disciples believed was in store for their Master. So, Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him for thinking such things.

Jesus looked around at the rest of His disciples, who had similar thoughts, and diagnosed the cause of such thinking. His words from verse 33, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” The thought that Jesus could somehow achieve the salvation of God’s elect without traveling the path of suffering smells like smoke and is from the pit of hell. Jesus must suffer for the sins of mankind in order to please a Holy God – His Father.

Jesus contrasts heavenly things from worldly things. The Apostle Paul picks up on this in his letter to the Church at Colossae (Colossians) when he writes “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:1-2).

**Application:** One challenge we have in this fallen world, Church, is our tendency to respond to life as everyone else does. When God saved us from our sinfulness, He did so through “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5) God gave us a new nature. He also gave us the capacity to think His thoughts; with a God-given new heart, we can now choose to please Him, instead of always choosing to please ourselves, which is the thinking of non-Christians.

Later in Colossians Chapter 3, Paul gives examples of “the things of men” that Jesus warned His disciples about – “fornication, impurity, evil desires, covetousness...anger, wrath, filthy language...lying.” (Col. 3:5, 8 & 9) Paul also gives examples of “the things above” in that 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Colossians “tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if (you have) a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.” (Col. 3:12-13) Forgive, defer and submit to, sacrifice for & love each other!

Clearly, Jesus came to earth to suffer for the benefit of others. Instead of being crowned, He had to be crucified. He died so we might die to self and live for others, too.

Having **traced the Messiah's Purpose**, we move on to the second part of this section (verses 34-38) which I've called, "**Travelling the Messiah's Path.**" Jesus' audience now expands, from His disciples only to including those who were not.

Jesus begins by explaining the cost of living as His follower – it ain't cheap; it's very costly! The standard is high to be a believer in Jesus Christ! It means we must abide by God's divine Word, even – no, especially - when we don't like what it says! To all present, Jesus said, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'

*Friend, what is your desire?* If you desire to be a follower of Jesus (His disciple) then you must deny yourself. Your goals must reflect His glory. Your choices must please Him. How you respond to challenges in your life speaks volumes about where your heart lies. Life is to be all about Jesus – if you want to please Him, you must resist and overcome what you want to do if it disagrees with the Bible. Naturally, we're attracted to take the path of least resistance – the easiest way, the quickest route, the most peaceful path. But, Jesus says there are lots of people on that broad way. Truly, that would be the highway that leads to hell.

Like Jesus, when He dragged His cross to Mt. Calvary to be crucified, we must take up our own cross. Jesus is not using cross bearing in this passage to describe the human experience of carrying some burden through life. People carrying their crosses were people going to their deaths. Cross bearing as a follower of Jesus means nothing less than giving one's whole life over to following Jesus.

*What are our crosses?* They are not simply trials and hardships. All people, whether Christian or not, have these in their lives. Nor can we consider an illness or a handicap a cross. No, a "cross comes from specifically walking in Christ's steps, embracing His life. It comes from bearing shame because we are embracing the narrow way of the Cross. It comes from living out the business and sexual ethics of Christ in the marketplace and the world. It comes from embracing weakness instead of power." (Hughes, 202)

The cross of Christ offers great deliverance, yet also demands great sacrifice.

Jesus continues in 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." Life with Jesus often opposes the values of life apart from Jesus. If you think you can save yourself, you won't because you can't. Jesus says you will lose your life if you try to save it. But, changing seats in the bus, from driver to passenger, means you will lose your life in order to save it. It's a matter of faith, not sight.

<p>The most famous author of the 1930s was William Somerset Maugham. He was a man who lived for refined tastes, comfort, and sexual perversions. In 1965, at the age of 91, he was still very rich, though he hadn't written a word in years. <i>What had life brought W. Somerset Maugham?</i> The <i>London Times</i> carried this excerpt written by his nephew, Robin Maugham:</p>
--

I looked round the drawing room at the immensely valuable furniture, pictures and objects my uncle's success enabled him to acquire. I remembered the Villa, the wonderful garden – a setting on the edge of the Mediterranean – worth many hundreds of thousands of dollars. Uncle had 11 servants. He dined off silver plates, had his own cook, butler, and footman.

One afternoon I found uncle reclining on a sofa, looking at a Bible which had very large print. He looked very grim. He looked up, seeing me, he said, "I've been reading the Bible you gave me...and I've come across the quotation, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' I must tell you, my dear Robin that the text used to hang opposite my bed when I was a child...of course, it's all a lot of bunk. But the thought is quite interesting all the same."

The wise Presbyterian Pastor, Matthew Henry wrote, "The gain of all the world in sin is not sufficient to counter-balance the ruin of the soul by sin." (Henry, 186)

In verse 38, Jesus said, "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."

I'd venture to guess this is not the favorite verse of many here this morning! If we have the opportunity to make a stand for the gospel of Jesus Christ; the Word of God, then we ought not be ashamed to do so. Yet, how often it happens when we struggle with the ramifications of confessing Christ before others and we do nothing. We may try to salve our riddled conscience by praying for those whom we should have said something to. Yet, deep in our heart, we know we have wasted our opportunity.

Such confession is to deny ourselves and to take up our cross.

### **Application:**

*Does your Christianity cost you anything?* A religion which costs nothing is worth nothing. It does us no good in the present life, and does not lead to salvation in the life to come.

It could be asked, "Is there any reward for the person who is a true disciple? Warren Wiersbe notes, "Yes, there is; he (or she) becomes more like Jesus Christ and one day shares in His glory. Satan promises you glory, but in the end, you receive suffering. God promises you suffering, but in the end, that suffering is transformed into glory. If we acknowledge Christ and live for Him, He will one day acknowledge us and share His glory with us." (Wiersbe, 140)