

Introduction

1. Are you a leader or a follower?
 - a. Most of us are both leaders and followers.
 - 1) We lead our children/grandchildren, a team at work or perhaps a group at church.
 - 2) We follow others leaders at work, church, or in civic organizations.
 - b. Life Principle: To be a good leader, you must be a good follower.
 - c. Who is the most important leader that you follow? I hope you answered Jesus Christ.
2. Jesus challenged His disciples with both the cost of following Him and the benefits of being His follower.
3. **Read Mk 8:34-9:1.**

A. The Cost of Following Jesus (8:34)

1. Jesus called “the crowd to him along with his disciples” for an important teaching about the cost of being one of His disciples. (34a)
 - a. The word used here for disciples (Gk., *mathetais*) means “pupils, learners.”
 - 1) The root of this word (Gk., *math-*) means “exercising mental effort to think something through.”
 - 2) Jesus called them to think through what it means to be one of His disciples and what it will cost.
 - b. *The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines a disciple as “Someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.”
2. Notice that Jesus spoke not just to the Twelve but to “anyone” who wished to follow Him.
 - a. Jesus told them that following Him, being His disciple, would not be easy.
 - b. It would come with a high cost that they must be willing to pay.
 - c. Wierbe writes, “*There is a price to pay for true discipleship.* [Jesus] knew that the crowds were following Him only because of the miracles, and that most of the people were unwilling to pay the price to become true disciples” (105).
3. Jesus specified the three costs that His true disciples/followers must be willing to pay. (34b)
 - a. Cost 1: “deny themselves” (Gk., *aparnesastho eauton*)
 - 1) Followers of Jesus must surrender themselves completely to Him by denying their own way in life and follow Jesus’ way in life.
 - 2) Recently, I’ve been denying myself certain foods (e.g., potatoes, sugar, bread) in order to lose some weight. I have denied myself but it has done me good (e.g., feel better, look better), but that is not the kind of beneficial self-denial that Jesus spoke of here.
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe writes, “Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will. . . . From the human point of view, we are losing ourselves, but from the divine perspective, we are finding ourselves” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 105).
 - b. Cost 2: “take up their cross” (Gk., *arato ton stauron*)
 - 1) A good leader never asks a follower to do something that he/she is unwilling to do him/herself.
 - 2) Jesus took up His cross and carried it to Calvary where He died for the sins of humanity.
 - 3) Jesus called His disciples to follow Him in the way of suffering and death.
 - 4) This was a radical call to His followers.
 - a) Peter and the other disciples were still trying to process the fact that Jesus was a suffering/dying kind of Messiah.
 - b) He had not come to be the powerful Messiah that they and their fellow-Jews had expected.
 - c) Now, Jesus was calling them to suffer and die as well? Unbelievable!
 - 5) James Brooks insightfully shares, “Many of [Jesus’] early followers did in fact die by crucifixion and in other ways. When martyrdom ceased to be common, cross bearing properly became a symbol of following Jesus in sacrificial service. The concept should never be cheapened by applying it to enduring some irritation or even a major burden. It is closely related to self-denial, involving a willingness to give up everything dear in life and even life itself for the sake of Jesus. It is a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for others. Such a concept of discipleship is so radical that many contemporary Christians in the West have difficulty relating to it” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 137).

c. Cost 3: “follow me” (Gk., *akoloutheito moi*)

- 1) This at first doesn't sound like a cost.
- 2) This is what the disciples had agreed to when they responded to Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (cf., Mk 1:16-20).
- 3) But did they truly understand what it meant to follow Jesus? Had they counted the cost, the cost of a cross on which they must sacrifice self.
- 4) We say that we follow Jesus, but have we counted the cost? Are we willing to pay the price?
- 5) We must follow Jesus obediently wherever He leads even when it is not where we want to go.
 - a) Peter would later deny Jesus three times. Jesus, after His resurrection would restore Peter as His follower and remind him of the cost of following Him.
 - b) Jesus said to Peter, “‘Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’” (Jn 21:18-19).

B. The Benefits of Following Jesus (8:35-38)

1. Jesus continued to speak not only about the costs of following Him but also about the benefits.
2. Jesus contrasted the way of the world and the way of God's kingdom follower by specifying three reasons that His disciples must be self-denying, cross-bearing, obedient disciples.
 - a. Jesus' disciples will save their lives by losing them.
 - 1) “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” (35)
 - 2) “life” (NIV) “soul” (KJV) (Gk. *psuchen*) – Jesus used the Greek word meaning “soul,” but this word refers to more than just our eternal nature. It speaks about the whole of life, both who we are and what we do now extending into eternity.
 - 3) Jesus argues the only way to “save” (Gk., *sodzo*) your life is to “lose” (Gk., *apolesei*) it.
 - a) The word “lose” (Gk., *apolesei*) means “release, let go.”
 - b) We must let go of the control of our life and let Jesus direct us in every decision and action.
 - c) Wiersbe writes, “To lose yourself is not an act of desperation; it is an act of devotion. But we do not stop there: Personal devotion should lead to practical duty, the sharing of the gospel with a lost world.” (Wiersbe, 105).
 - d) The lives of Jesus' disciples are focused on Jesus and the good news, the gospel, about Him.
 - 4) Jesus asks us to do nothing that He Himself was unwilling to do. He released His will and life in obedience to the will and plan of His Father. So must we.
 - 5) It is in releasing control of life as Jesus directs us in gospel ministry that we find real meaning and fulfillment in life.
 - a) Jesus stated His life goal and His goal for our lives in Mk 10:45 – “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
 - b) In John's gospel Jesus said it this way, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10).
 - b. Jesus' disciples will not risk forfeiting their souls in the pursuit of worldly gain.
 - 1) “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (36)
 - a) To “gain the whole world” (Gk., *kerdesai ton kosmon olon*) at little or no personal cost was at the heart of Satan's temptation of Jesus (cf., Mk 1:13, Lk 4:5-8) and still of us today.
 - b) The penalty for those intent on gaining the world is that they “forfeit their soul.”
 - c) “forfeit (Gk., *zemiothnai*) means “cause or experience loss (forfeiture), especially carrying a penalty (significant detriment)”
 - 2) What or who will be our focus in life: God or the world? This is the crucial choice that we each face and must make in life.

- 3) Wiersbe writes, “Discipleship is a matter of profit and loss, a question of whether we will *waste* our lives or *invest* our lives. Notice the severe warning Jesus gives us here: Once we have spent our lives, we cannot buy them back! Remember, He was instructing His *disciples*, men who had already confessed Him as the Son of God. He was not telling them how to be saved and go to heaven, but how to save their lives and make the most of their opportunities on earth. ‘Losing your soul’ is the equivalent of wasting your life, missing the great opportunities God gives you to make your life count. You may ‘gain the whole world’ and be a success in the eyes of men, and yet have nothing to show for your life when you stand before God” (Wiersbe 105-6).

- 4) Paul said it this way to the church at Philippi, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).

c. For Jesus’ disciples, the price of eternal life has been paid.

- 1) Jesus asked, “Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (37)
- 2) What is the price of eternal life? The implied answer is nothing. Even if one had the whole world to give, it would not be enough.
- 3) Wiersbe writes, “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 106).
- 4) Jesus lost/gave His life to pay the price for our sins and our entrance into God’s eternal kingdom.
- 5) There is nothing that we can give or do to pay or even payback the price Jesus has paid for us.
- 6) Out of love and respect for Jesus, we lay our lives on the altar of sacrifice to Him as Paul declared, “. . . in view of God’s mercy, . . . offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Ro 12:1).

3. Jesus gave a warning about the importance of the choice that we make and the associated costs/benefits.

- a. “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” (38)

b. The Cost of rejecting Jesus and following the way of the world is to be rejected by Jesus in the end.

- 1) Rejection of Jesus means to be ashamed (Gk., *epaischunthe me*) of Jesus and His words.
- 2) Jesus describes those who reject Him as an “adulterous and sinful generation” (Gk., *moichalidi kai amartolo*).
 - a) James Brooks writes, “The background of the expression ‘adulterous . . . generation’ is the Old Testament where unfaithfulness to God is sometimes described as adultery (e.g., Jer 3:6-9; 13:27; and Hosea, where Gomer is a picture of unfaithful Israel)” (Brooks, *Mark*, 138).
 - b) We are also “adulterous” when we know the Truth of Jesus but deny Him with our words and actions before others.

- 3) Jesus in turn is “ashamed of them” (Gk., *epaischunthesetai auton*).

- 4) Rejection of the Son of Man bears eternal consequences.

- 5) There is a time of judgment coming for everyone “when he comes” (Gk., *otan elthe*)

c. By inference, Jesus’ disciples who are not be ashamed of Him but faithfully proclaim His gospel in word and deed despite the worldly consequences, will be welcomed by Jesus into eternity when He returns.

- 1) We must honor Jesus and His words with our words and actions toward others.
- 2) Remember the example of Peter and John when the Sanhedrin “. . . had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5:40-42).
- 3) May we not be ashamed and continue to proclaim Jesus as Messiah with our words and deeds even at the cost of our lives.

C. The Kingdom of God Has Come (9:1)

1. Jesus came proclaiming “the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15)
2. Here he made a strong summary pronouncement of truth about the kingdom of God when He said, “Truly (Gk., *amen*) I tell you some who are standing here will not taste death (Gk., *thanatou*) before they see that the kingdom of God has come (Gk., *eluluthuian*) with power.” (9:1)
3. Note that Jesus said that the “kingdom of God has come.”
 - a) The verb is a Perfect participle meaning that the kingdom has already come and is here to stay.
 - b) God’s kingdom plan is unfolding in the life of Jesus who has submitted His life in obedience to His Father’s plan.
 - c) The kingdom power now present in Him and will soon be released into the world through His death and resurrection.
 - d) Jesus is not going away. He has taken up His cross and will carry it faithfully all the way up Calvary’s hill to complete the Father’s plan and release the kingdom in and through His disciples.
4. Jesus’ words in this verse are filled with difficulties and have resulted in various interpretations. Brooks concludes, “Despite interpretive difficulties, this saying was a word of encouragement to the powerless ones in Mark’s community who struggled to remain loyal to Jesus despite harassment and the prospect of real persecution (cf., the warning in 8:38): some will indeed live to see God exercise his reign:” (Brooks, 140).
5. One likely meaning that Jesus had was to point to His Transfiguration, a moment when the heavenly glory of the Son of Man came to earth. The Transfiguration in Mark 9:2-13 will be our topic next week.

D. Reflections

1. How have you lost or given up your life in order to follow Jesus?
2. What is your cross, your sacrifice of life for the King?
 - a. How well and faithfully do you carry your cross?
 - b. Are you carrying it each day or just when convenient?
3. “How have we made the normal Christian life less radical than what the Bible calls for?” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 177).
4. What have you gained in this life as you have followed Jesus?
5. Are you ashamed of Jesus and His words or are you proud to share them in both word and deed each day?
 - a. Do your words and actions toward others lift up, proclaim, and glorify Jesus?
 - b. Do people know that you are a Christian by your words/deeds or do they think you are of the world?
 - c. Is there enough evidence in your life to convict you of being a Christian?
6. Are you looking forward to Jesus’ return?
 - a. Are you ready?
 - b. What future gain to you anticipate in God’s eternal kingdom?
7. Live each day following Jesus and you will be ready whenever He comes in power and glory.