

# “Whoever Desires to Come After Me”

Mark 8:34 – 9:1

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## Introduction

Last week in our sermon series in Mark, we looked at Mark 8:31-33.

- Here, we find Jesus slowly heading to Jerusalem where He will be crucified.
  - His disciples have finally come to see that He is the Christ (the Messiah), but they have no idea what that entails.
- So at this juncture, He begins to tell them that being *the Christ* means that He must suffer and be rejected by the highest court of the Jewish church, die, and rise again.
  - This was unconscionable to the disciples, so Peter took Him aside to rebuke Him.
  - Jesus rebuked Peter, saying to Him, “**Get behind me Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but of the things of men (Mark 8:33).**”
- I explained to you that when the Son of God came to be Christ (or the Messiah), it meant that He must go to the cross.
  - Jesus did not say simply that He *would* suffer and be rejected and die and rise again, but that He *must* (Mark 8:31) do all of this...
  - It was what He must do to save His people from their sins.
  - His church was made up of people who, like all people, were guilty of eating the forbidden fruit—
    - by that act renouncing God as their lord and putting themselves in His place.
    - That’s why, to save them and restore them to God, Jesus had to go to the cross for them.

That is what Jesus had to do because of His association with us.

- In today’s text (Mark 8:34 – 9:1), He tells us what every person must do who desires to be associated with Him.
- Listen as I read it to you.
  - This is God’s holy Word beginning at Mark 8:34:

**Mark 8:34 – 9:1: 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.”<sup>9:1</sup> And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”**

May the LORD add His blessing to the reading and now to the preaching of His holy word.

- So again, when He came to be associated with us, a sinful church, it meant that He had to suffer, be rejected, die and rise again.
  - Now let's look at what is required of us if we wish to be associated with Him.
- I. First, I want you to see that what Jesus says here, He says to all (and that includes all of you).**
- A. We are told in verse 34 that He called the people (the crowd) to Himself with His disciples.
1. He had been speaking to His twelve disciples privately when they had confessed that He was the Christ and He had told them that He must suffer...
    - It would seem that He had taken them aside, as He often did, to speak to them privately, but now He calls out to the crowd that were around to come and hear.
    - Throughout the gospel accounts, the multitude is always near, and we often see Him stepping aside to speak to His disciples, and then to the whole crowd—as He did, for example, at the feeding miracles.
  2. This calling of the people suggests that what He says here, He says to everyone.
    - It is not a message for the insiders, but for all to hear.
    - That means that we it is meant for us also.
- B. The language He uses throughout this text also indicates that what He says applies to everyone.
1. He begins His address to them by saying, “*Whoever* desires to come after Me.”
    - And then in verse 35, He says, “*Whoever* desires to save his life.”
    - And in verse 38, “*Whoever* is ashamed of Me...”
  2. The word “whoever” shows that what He says here pertains to every person that wishes to come to Him for salvation.
    - It is not just for people who want a special place in His kingdom—it is for anyone who wants to go to heaven.
- C. Why do I stress this?
1. I stress this because I want you to see that it applies to you.
    - There is a lot of false teaching out there that denies that anyone who wishes to be saved must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Jesus.
      - I don't want any of you to be deceived by such false teaching.
    - Those who deny this requirement say that it is a teaching of salvation by works, but it is not that at all.
      - Certainly, it would be wrong if Jesus meant that by denying ourselves and taking up our cross, we do such a fine deed that God accepts us as righteous in His sight.
        - That would make the cross of Christ itself completely unnecessary!
    - Remember what I showed you last week.
      - We are all guilty of eating the forbidden fruit. We are all implicated as those who rejected God as our God.

- And that is such a wretched thing, along with all the sins that we have committed as a result of it, that it made it necessary for the Son of God to come and bear our shame on the cross if we were to be saved.
  - It also meant that He had to come and live a life that was acceptable to God in our behalf.
    - It is only by trusting in Him and what He did as our Saviour that anyone can be accepted by God.
2. But being justified by Christ does not mean that we can be justified without being associated with Him as His disciples.
- If we wish to have a share in the blessing of the salvation and righteousness that He procured for us, we must receive Him and rest upon Him.
  - Trusting in Him is what secures our righteousness from Him, but those who come to Him in faith must come and follow Him.
    - If you don't come to Him and follow Him, it means that you don't really trust in Him—it means that you don't have true saving faith.
    - As our Confession says about faith in the chapter on justification,
      - “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is not dead faith, but worketh by love.”
  - The truth is that it is impossible for anyone to come to Christ to trust in Him for salvation without that person also turning from His sin to follow Him.
    - That is why those who deny Christ and refuse to follow Him should not be allowed to be members in good standing of His church.
    - As has always been the case, the church is very negligent about enacting church discipline, but that does not change the fact that those who are in the church but refuse to follow Christ are not true disciples.
      - Throughout His ministry, He constantly warned those in the church that they were not truly His disciples just for being associated with the church—only if they believed and followed Him.

## **II. Jesus shows you right here what you must do to truly be associated with Him as your Saviour.**

- Look from the middle of verse 34: **“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”**
- A. The principal action is that we follow Him.
- That is the last thing that Jesus mentions here, but I want to mention it first since it is the essence of discipleship—we come after Him to follow Him.
1. This has always been the case with the Lord.
- In the Old Testament, He called people out of the world to be His people, and in the New Testament, He does the same.

- Only now, in the New Testament, He has come in the flesh and has died on the cross for us so that the new covenant is in His blood instead of in the blood of bulls and goats.
2. The whole reason we come to be saved by Him is so that we can follow Him.
    - We come to be saved from our sins, not merely so that we will not be punished, but so that we can serve Him as our God.
      - We were cut off because of our sin and He saves us from our sin so that we can walk with Him—to use the words of the covenant, that He might be our God and that we might be His people.
  3. It is a very strange thing indeed to suppose that someone has come to Him to be saved by Him who does not want to follow Him.
    - They have a different meaning and intent for salvation... merely to escape punishment.
    - But Jesus came to restore us to the Father and to Himself— “This is eternal life, that you might know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.”
- But now let us look at the other two requirements.
- B. Jesus mentions two other requirements that are necessary for anyone that wishes to follow Him.
1. First, He tells us that we must deny ourselves.
    - Jesus says, “**Let him deny himself.**” (v. 34)
    - Of course we must.
      - At the fall, we made ourselves the lord of our lives, but if you are going to follow Jesus, you must renounce yourself as lord of your life.
        - You must defer to His judgment about everything.
        - You must defer to His wisdom.
        - You must follow His calling.
        - You must reshape your whole life according to His commandments.
          - Cursing is no longer an option, sex outside of marriage is no longer an option, lying on your income taxes is no longer an option.
      - If you deny yourself, you are no longer lord—He is.
        - You put yourself in His hands for salvation.
        - You look to Him to govern you and renounce self-government.
        - You must deny yourself and follow Him.
  2. Second, if you would come after Him, it means that you must take up your cross.
    - Taking up the cross means that you must accept the rejection that comes from your association with Jesus.
      - a. For Him, it meant that He had to accept rejection from the Father and from the world!
        - *Rejection from the Father* because of His association with us as those who ate the forbidden fruit—

- He became our representative and then He had to bear the shame of our sins and bear their penalty on the cross that we might be pardoned.
  - And He had to accept *rejection from the world* —and especially from the very church itself, because He exposed their sins...
    - that they were so bad that their Messiah’s mission was to bear their sins on the cross.
    - They wanted a Messiah that would think they were righteous and give them authority to rule the world, but what they got was Him!
    - He was so offensive to them that they delivered Him up to the crucified.
- That’s what taking up the cross meant for Him.
- b. *For us*, taking up the cross means that we must bear the rejection of the Father and the world also because of our association with Jesus—but not in the same way that He did.
- 1) We accept the rejection of Christ as our rejection—that His rejection was in fact the Father’s rejection of us as sinners.
    - That it was our sins that were being punished when He suffered the rejection of the Father, and that it was all perfectly just.
    - This is the thing that is hard for us to accept—that we are so bad that the Son of God had come and be cursed or we could not accepted.
      - Nobody wants to admit that.
      - We have trouble admitting our wrongdoing in everyday life—we always want to justify our actions—
      - It requires a powerful work of the Spirit to convince us our sin and of the eternal punishment that we deserve—punishment that no one but Jesus can save us from.
  - So when you take up your cross, you accept the Father’s rejection of you because of your vileness that Jesus bore.
  - 2) And in accepting that, you also accept the rejection of the world.
    - The very fact that you are walking around saying that you and everyone else are such sinners that only Christ crucified can save you is the offense of the cross.
    - It is especially offensive to religious people—especially to religious people in the church who are supposing that they are acceptable to God without a Saviour bearing the curse for them.
    - They do not want to acknowledge that about themselves or about the human race in general.
      - They want a Jesus of their own making that does not call for denying yourself and taking up your cross.
        - To them, the cross is suffering for any good cause rather than accepting that God punished Christ for our sins.
      - If you say that you are a Christian, that is fine—but if you say that you believe that no one can be saved apart from Christ crucified, that is when you will be opposed.

- Bearing *that* opposition is what it means to bear the cross.
3. Certainly it is not easy to deny yourself and take up your cross.
- It is hard to deny yourself because of your pride and your desire to rule your own life.
  - And it is hard to take up the cross because of course you don't like being rejected by the world—and you have problems with pride too so that it is hard for you to accept that you are so bad that you need a crucified Saviour.
  - But if you would come after Christ, you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.

TRANS> Jesus knows that it is hard for us to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Him. Therefore,

### **III. Jesus graciously reasons with you about the benefits of coming after Him—of denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Him.**

- He does this in verses 35-38. Let's look at His helpful words!
- A. First, in verse 35, He argues with you that by losing your life for Him, you actually gain it forever!
- He says: **“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.”**
1. The word *psoo-khay* translated **life** in this verse is that same word that is translated **soul** in the next two verses.
- The *soul*, says Lane, designates man in his totality, his vitality, his profound dynamism which includes his appetite for the good things of life but also his frailty threatened by death.
  - It is indeed your life in the fullest sense...
- a. And the irony here is that those who in pride hold on to their lives and refuse to give themselves to Christ are the ones who end up losing their lives in the end.
- The word translated **lose** is in fact more like the word **destroy**.
  - You actually destroy your life by trying to hang on to it—by refusing to let go of your life and follow Christ—to abandon it to Him—to entrust your soul to Him.
- b. It is so frustrating to see people clinging to their lives instead of coming to Christ.
- You see them clinging to their dignity, refusing to confess that they are sinners in need of Christ...
  - You see them holding on to bitterness, wanting to hold on to the lie that God has somehow wronged them and not seeing that they deserve much worse from His hand.
  - You see them pursuing their own desires—whether for comfort, escape, or sheer pleasure—by pornography, sexual immorality, revenge, greed (such as

lying on taxes—a temptation at this time of year), drunkenness, ignoring needs, or whatever.

- You destroy the very life you are trying to enhance by holding on to these things.
  - You are like miser who hoards his money until it utterly destroys him.
    - Tax money you cling to by lying actually destroys your soul.
    - Pornography eats away at your life—makes your walk with God numb and destroys your ability to love others.
- Think about this—are you really trying to do the will of God, or are you a hypocrite who is living for yourself and trying to justify it?
- Is your life really about pleasing Christ?
  - Paul said, Gal 1:10: **For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.**
2. Jesus declares plainly that it is by giving up your life to Him that you save it.
- a. What a grand claim that is—a claim that only the Son of God could make!
    - Who else but He could say, “If you lose your life for My sake and the gospels, you will save it!”
    - It would be the height of arrogance for any man to make such a claim.
  - b. But what a grand thing it is on His lips, because it is true!
    - We are all destined to perish as a defiled wretched rebels,
      - But here is the promise of salvation in Jesus the crucified one if only we will turn from our pride and come to follow Him.
  - c. It is the only reasonable thing to do.
    - As Jim Elliott put it: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.”

TRANS> See how our Lord goes on to reason with us further.

B. In verses 36-37, He asks what good it will do you to gain the whole world and lose your soul?

- His words are: **“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?”**
1. He helping you to look at life from an eternal perspective.
- Life is much more than this world.
    - Our souls have a much greater capacity than this present fallen world where our pride and selfishness prevail and where there is death and the curse and estrangement from God.
  - It makes no sense to go on in this world without considering the world to come where you will spend eternity.
  - As Calvin said, “What carelessness and what brutal stupidity is this, that men are so strongly attached to the world, and so much occupied with its affairs, as not to

consider why they were born, and that God gave them an immortal soul, in order that, when the course of the earthly life was finished, they might live eternally in heaven!”

2. Yes, there are many excellent things in this world, but the truth is that we can enjoy them more if we receive them as those who are walking with Christ...
  - If we stop living for them and start living for Him with the hope of eternal life, we actually enjoy them more.
    - We receive them with thanksgiving as gifts of His love, but only when we are willing to let them go in service to Him...
    - Life becomes rich when you let go the sins you cherish to follow Jesus,
      - And when you let go of the acceptance of the world so that you live for the smile of Lord instead of the smile of the world...
      - How much happier you will be.
  - On the night that he suffered martyrdom, Bishop Hooper said:
    - “True it is, that life is sweet, and death is bitter,
      - but eternal death is more bitter, and eternal life is more sweet.”
3. I urge you to think about this now—not after it is too late!
  - How sad it is to see the rich man from the parable in torment crying out to the Lord to send someone from the dead to speak to his brothers and warn them.
  - He never stopped to estimate the relative value of this world compared to the next—he was a fool who lived in pride and luxury with no thought of eternity.
    - Don’t live for this world, live for the Lord Jesus.

TRANS> How gracious our Lord is to reason with us about our souls and their inestimable value.

- The third thing He asks us to consider is for those who say, “I want to have both Christ and the favour of the world.”

C. He insists that we must choose between Him and the sinful and adulterous world.

1. He makes it clear that you cannot be accepted by both.
  - He says: v. 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.”**
  - a. This is an absolute statement.
    - Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
    - To find acceptance from this adulterous and sinful generation, you have to be ashamed of Jesus.
    - And if you are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of you.
      - You have to choose one or the other.



- b. You have to choose because the world has no use for Jesus—not the real Jesus who went to the cross for those who ate the forbidden fruit.
    - They will have their own versions of Jesus, but the real Jesus is quite offensive to them.
      - He says that we have to accept His standards and that He had to go to the cross to be cursed by God to save us.
      - He says that anyone who does not come to Him will be condemned in hell forever.
    - The world is ashamed of a Jesus like that.
      - But here is the worst part—churches and church members who want to please the world are ashamed of a Jesus like that too...
        - But He is the only Jesus that is coming in glory.
  - c. And He will not accept anyone who is ashamed of Him and His words.
    - And notice, it is not only the cross that you must not be ashamed of, but also the things Jesus teaches—His words...we must not be ashamed of Him *or His words*.
      - For example, you must not be ashamed of the fact that He says, through His apostle who spoke by His Spirit,
        - **1 Cor 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**
          - That is what His word says, and if you are ashamed of that, He will be ashamed of you.
2. What does it mean for Him to be ashamed of you?
- It means that He will not acknowledge you as someone who belongs to Him.
    - It means that He will reject you in that day.
  - And I tell you, His rejection will be much worse than the world's rejection.
    - The world has some glory now, but it won't have any when He comes in His glory!
    - They can crucify Him and spit on Him while they have their glory, but when He comes in His glory they will be the ones who are ashamed,
      - and so will all those who were ashamed to own Him before them.
- The day of judgment is a day that really will come.
3. To give assurance of this, Jesus promises that some of those who heard Him will see His kingdom come with power before they die.

- **Mark 9:1: And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”**
- a. When Jesus spoke to this crowd, His kingdom was still quite hidden.
  - This might make them question about His declaration that He will come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.
  - But He assures them that even while some of them are still alive, they will see His kingdom present with power.
- b. There is much debate about what He refers to here, but the clearest explanation is that He is talking about the judgment of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the Son of Man comes in the clouds to judge those who were ashamed of Him.
  - There is also His resurrection and His ascension that show Him coming in His kingdom and that is part of it,
    - And there is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when 3000 souls come to Him to be saved and there is the spread of the gospel to the nations...
  - But His power is displayed in terms that the world understands especially upon those that rejected Him when He brought destruction to Jerusalem as He said He would—that they would see the Son of Man coming with the clouds in glory—a reference to providential judgment.
- c. This is of course but a foreshadowing of His final judgment that is spoken of in 8:38, but it testifies and confirms that He will judge all who are ashamed of Him.
  - As those who live after the cross and after 70 AD, we should be all the more confident that Jesus means what He says.
  - He will judge those in the church who are ashamed of Him and who do not accept that we are so wicked that He had to be crucified.
    - If you are among those who want to say that people are good or that people can be saved without coming to Jesus, then you are just like the Jews who rejected Jesus when He was here.
    - They were the church for whom He came, but only a remnant of them were not ashamed of Him—much as it is today in the visible church.

### **Conclusion**

So you see how graciously our Lord Jesus urges you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.

- Ask yourself if you are among those who have done that—or among those who have not.
- It is not a trivial question—it is a question of eternal magnitude.
  - You are very foolish if you brush it off after hearing the solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - Come and embrace Him as the One who was crucified for sinners!

- Receive Him and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel.
- If you wish to come after Him, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.
  - Join yourself to Him instead of to His enemies in this sinful and adulterous generation—why do you want acceptance with them?
  - Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.
    - Then you will never be ashamed.