

I. Introduction

A. What does it mean to follow Jesus?

1. "I'm a Christian."
2. Growing up, carnal vs spiritual
3. Today: evangelical, mainline Protestant, fundamental, progressive, liberal, conservative, etc. Example - "In fact, if you don't forward this or have the courage to then you're also probably not a Christian."

B. Bottom line

1. No matter what your descriptor attached to "Christian," the bottom line is that Jesus calls you to be like Him and participate with Him in His mission.
2. No one comes to Jesus that doesn't require radical change in thinking and behavior; closer to Jesus, less I trust myself

II. Following Jesus

A. "And He began ..."

1. New theme in Mark's Gospel beginning
2. Rejection and talk of death
 - a. Typically, when someone talks rejection and death we have reason to be concerned.
 - b. But Jesus is neither gloomy nor fatalistic.
 - c. Jesus' language of death is not meaningless or tragic fate but is freely accepted and purposeful.
3. The death of Jesus is necessary; it is the means of fulfilling His Messianic mission.
 - a. Jesus' death comes not as the triumph of the opposition but as the fulfillment of God's divine purpose.
 - b. Death for life; life for death perspective

*Not only was Jesus sharing His destiny with the disciples, but He called them to see it in their own lives.

B. Demand of discipleship (vs 31-34)

1. Jesus announces His rejection, death, and Resurrection (v 31)
 - a. Something the Jews would not expect the Messiah to say.
 - b. "Must" = the divine purpose revealed in Scripture rather than the inevitability of Palestinian politics
2. Peter, speaking for the 12, rejects Jesus' announcement (vs 32-33)
 - a. Peter was likely concerned about Jesus but also, even more so, concerned about himself (he had left all to follow Jesus).
 - b. Peter rebuked publicly (because he was not alone in his thinking)
 - 1) "Satan": strongest rebuke Jesus gives in the Gospels
 - 2) Jesus describes Peter having "human thoughts", but they are so at odds with God's plan they are attached to a more supernatural source.

*Peter is influenced and acting as a spokesman for the spiritual beings warring against God!

c. Incompatible ideologies

- 1) Peter represents the plan of Israel for the Messiah and Jesus is living out the plan of God.
- 2) The problem is not beneficial competing loyalties but of incompatible ideologies of a human perspective which cannot grasp the divine perspective.

*The season we are in right now has a human solution applying human wisdom and greed that cannot grasp the divine purpose without seeing through the perspective of God—an expressly biblical worldview.

d. Take-away

- 1) v 29: Peter's high point and confession; v 33: Peter's low point and condemnation
- 2) A person can be right about Jesus and even celebrated but can also be stuck in a hostile worldview toward the mission of God.

*You can be "for" all the right causes but be in direct opposition with God's purposes.

3. Jesus shifts to the crowd. (v 34)

*What Jesus is saying here does not apply only to the 12 (the elite, the pastors, the Bible study leaders, etc.) but to anyone who wants to follow Jesus - essential elements of discipleship.

a. Deny self

- 1) To refuse to be guided by my own interests, to surrender control of my destiny for the interest of Jesus and the Gospel
- 2) A radical abandonment of my own identity and self-determination
 - a) This is at extreme odds with the "my truth" culture.
 - b) Life is not actually about being me but becoming like Jesus

*Denying myself is more than giving up chocolate for lent. It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of self itself.

b. Take up your cross

- 1) The domestication of my cross. Not about the normal frustrations of life (anger problem, hardships, things that are a result of a sinful environment)

*Whatever has happened in the midst of COVID, etc. is not cross bearing.

- 2) Bearing my cross is a sacrifice to become like Jesus and to participate in the Gospel mission.

*If you have given up something because of Jesus during COVID then that might be cross bearing.

c. Keep following (Progressive, keep denying and taking up)

C. Reason for discipleship (vs 35-9:1)

1. Your Life depends on it (v 35)

- a. The call is to the extent of giving up your physical life on account of Jesus.
 - 1) Includes the loss of privilege, advantage, reputation, comfort, and the like
 - 2) Nothing is held back including death.
- b. What do I live for then?
 - 1) Jesus: imitation and transformation
 - 2) The Gospel: participation in the mission (the Good News)

*Not merely imitation (discipleship) but participation (evangelism)!

2. What's more valuable than your life? (vs 36-37)

- a. “Gain the whole world”: the height of human ambition and achievement, measured in terms of earthly life
- b. Nothing on Earth can compensate for the loss of one’s soul—which drives us to live for Jesus and share Him urgently and compassionately with others.

*Is whatever you promote on social media worth as much as a person’s soul? Is our freedom to do what we want worth as much as a person’s soul? Jesus says no. And thank God that He did.

- 3. A sure thing (vs 38-9:1)
 - a. Shame and honor
 - 1) Choice for every person - Where do you want to be honored?
 - 2) Human society (whatever venue is your tribe) or eternal sphere?
 - 3) Choose human—lose eternal; choose eternal—lose some or all human, but you have what matters and is lasting
 - b. When we deny ourselves and take up our cross, we have assurance that the ultimate power is with God, not with those who may threaten our way of life even unto death.
 - 1) “Not taste death”: likely the transfiguration
 - 2) In addition, Mark 1:15, “the Kingdom of God is at hand”

*The point is that this is the way to follow Jesus.

III. Application and conclusion

- A. Beginning of transformation
 - 1. Self-denial
 - a. Not about things but about surrender and humility
 - b. To deny myself begins with recognition that my bias is for me and all my thoughts/reactions must be suspected rebels.
 - 2. Taking up my cross
 - a. Not about the hardness of life or effects of living on a planet fractured by sin
 - b. To take up my cross begins with the positive action of choosing the way of Jesus regardless of what it may cost me.

*Transformation begins for every person with more frequent “nos” to their natural desires and growing “yesses” to acting out the revealed character of Jesus.

- B. This is impossible
 - 1. Over the next few passages in Mark, we will see that disciples wrestle with the ridiculousness of this request Jesus makes.
 - 2. And Jesus will continue to repeat Himself.

*What will you and I choose to do with this?