

Murdo Campbell Mark 8:34-38

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] But if I could with the Lord's help and guidance this morning, if I could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Mark chapter 8 and if you read again at verse 34. Mark chapter 8 verse 34. And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life will lose it. But whosoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of him will the Son of man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. These words are some of the most solemn words that Jesus spoke during his life and ministry. We know that Jesus said many things and we know that Jesus did many things. We know that he told many parables. We know that he taught many people. We know that he performed many miracles and he healed many diseases. But for all that Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry, I believe that the words of this passage are some of the most solemn words Jesus ever spoke. And I say that because in these words, Jesus strips everything back. He peels away everything that is on the exterior, everything that people can see, all the outward appearances before others, all the outward facades of religion, all the pretence of righteousness. And Jesus removes all our crutches of salvation that we cling to so dearly. And he takes away every religious support that we try and lean upon and find comfort in. And he then pushes away to the side every explanation and excuse that we try and find for ourselves as to why we have not yet become a Christian. And Jesus goes right into the depth of our being and he addresses our undying soul. And he says to us, what shall it profit a man or a woman if they gain the whole world and lose their own soul?

Solemn words. But when Jesus speaks these solemn words, we say that he doesn't confine them to his audience or to this select group. He doesn't limit his address in any way. He doesn't say that it's only for his disciples. He doesn't restrict the number of people who can listen to his soul searching sermon. He doesn't put up any barriers of age or race or background or social status or language. He just says that this is a sermon for whosoever. It's for whosoever. He says that this is a sermon addressed to everyone and it's for everyone. And so my friend, this solemn sermon of Jesus is for everyone who is in this audience today. And it's for everyone who is not. This sermon is addressed to whosoever, which means that no one is excluded and everyone is included.

It's addressed to you personally. It has your name on it. Jesus's sermon here is for you. I don't know if you've ever thought that when you come to church, Jesus is speaking to you. But here, Jesus is speaking to you. And in the words of this sermon, Jesus is not only addressing you as a person created in the image of God. He's also addressing your soul, your precious soul. And he wants you to listen to what he has to say. He wants you to pay attention to his sermon because it's a sermon for whosoever. So please, please, please listen to what Jesus is saying to you.

Give your attention to this sermon because the first thing that Jesus says in his sermon is that there is a call to whosoever. There's a call to whosoever that says in verse 34, and he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. And so what we see here is that before Jesus began even preaching his solemn sermon, he called all the multitudes and all of the disciples which had been following Jesus throughout the region of Judea. And he called them together to hear what he had to say to them. And Jesus called the multitudes and his disciples together because there was so much confusion and misunderstanding about the identity of Jesus. Everyone was discussing the identity of Jesus. Everyone was hazarding a guess as to who Jesus is. Some were saying that Jesus is John the Baptist. That's what it says in verse 28. Some were saying that Jesus is Elijah. Others were saying that Jesus is one of the prophets. But then Jesus turns to his disciples and he asks them, well, who do you say that I am? And it was at that moment that Peter stepped forward and he made that great confession of his faith in verse 29, you are the Christ. You are the Christ. But even then Peter didn't understand fully who the Christ is and what it means to follow the Christ.

Because when Jesus explained, as he went on to explain in verse 31 and 32, that he must suffer many things and be killed and on the third day rise again, Peter couldn't accept this teaching.

[6 : 59] And he rebuked Jesus for saying such a thing. And it was then that Jesus rebuked Peter and said, as it is in verse 33, get behind me Satan, for you're not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. Jesus referred to Peter as Satan because Peter was ignorantly trying to make Jesus turn aside from the way of the cross. But the way of the Christ must always be the way of the cross. And Satan's earnest desire was to put Jesus off from going to the cross. And his earnest desire with us too is that we will go any other way apart from the way of the cross.

And Jesus knew that. Jesus knows that. Jesus knows what Satan is about, that he's trying to put us any other way apart from the way of the cross. And because Jesus knows that, that's why he calls all the multitudes together to hear his solemn sermon. And Jesus addresses the misunderstandings about his identity and about what it means to be his disciple. And Jesus says, the only way to be my disciple, the only way to be a Christian is to go the way of the cross, to go the way of the cross. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

And so as Jesus begins to preach about what it means to follow him, he addresses the multitudes. But what we must be aware of is that the multitude goes further than those who were present that day. In fact, the multitude whom Jesus addresses, it went beyond the shores of Galilee, and it went beyond the boundaries of the nation of Israel, because the multitude whom Jesus is addressing reaches every tribe, tongue, nation, and language. But even more than that, even more than that, the multitude that Jesus is addressing, it stretches through time. It stretches through time, through all the centuries of history, right up until our present day today, the 10th of April 2016. And then it goes beyond us into the future. Because when Jesus issues his call to become a disciple, he says, whosoever, whosoever, whosoever. And you know, the word whosoever, it's probably one of the most beautiful words in the gospel. It's a word which Jesus used often. All we have to do is consider the most well-known verse in the Bible. You all know it. It's printed on a car outside. John 3.16, we can see that in that verse, we're being addressed there too, where Jesus is revealing to Nicodemus one of the most glorious things about the gospel, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

And there's one thing about this word whosoever. It's that it emphasizes to us that the gospel is a free, universal offer of God's love and salvation through Jesus Christ. It's offered to whosoever.

There's no type of person that is exempt from this message of good news. Doesn't matter who they are, doesn't matter what they've done, doesn't matter what their past is, no one is exempt. No one is disqualified. No one is excluded. There are no restrictions, no boundaries, no constraints upon accepting this offer, because accepting this offer is not a case of are you good enough?

[11 : 14] It's a case of are you bad enough? Do you see that you're sinful enough to come to this Christ? My friend, the call to come to Christ, it's a universal offer, and it's a free offer. It's for whosoever. That includes everyone and excludes no one. I don't want, and you know, I don't want to hear any of this perversion of the doctrine of God's election, where you say, if I'm going to be saved, I will be saved. None of that, none of this hiding behind God's sovereign election and predestination, because God's sovereignty isn't what's heralded in the gospel.

Jesus never says sit where you are. Jesus never says wait and see what will happen on the day of judgment. No, no, no, Jesus says whosoever will let him come unto me, which means that it's our responsibility. It's our responsibility. We are responsible. We are accountable before God, whether we accept this offer or not. My friend, there is no excuse good enough for not coming to Christ. There is no excuse good enough for not being saved. There is no excuse good enough to put the blame on someone else or something else, because Jesus is clearly presenting to us today that this offer of the gospel, this call to become a disciple of Jesus is to whosoever.

Whosoever, the offer is as wide as possible. It's as wide as possible, whether Jew or Gentile, religious or not, good or bad, male or female, rich or poor, young or old, whatever situation in life, whosoever, the offer is as wide as possible. But then it becomes as narrow as possible. He says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. And in this, Jesus is reminding us that the call to whosoever, the call to become a follower of Jesus, it comes at a cost. It comes at a cost. I hope you're still listening to what Jesus is saying to you. Please give your attention to his sermon, because it's a sermon for whosoever, sermon for you. And in his sermon, Jesus tells us there's a call to whosoever. But secondly, Jesus tells us that there is a cost for whosoever, a cost for whosoever. If you read it again at the second half of verse 34, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever would save his life, will lose it. But whosoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? For what can a man give in exchange for his soul? So what is sermon? Jesus says that the call to become a disciple, it's to whosoever. The offer is as wide as possible.

But then it becomes as narrow as possible, because to become a disciple comes at a cost. And the cost is your own life. He says, if anyone would come after me, deny himself, take up his cross, follow me. Whosoever would save his life, will lose it. But whosoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it. But when Jesus says that in order to be his disciple, we must deny self, he's not talking about self denial. Because denying self and self denial, there are two completely different things. Self denial is this outward action. It focuses more upon the denial. And it's often as opposed for a good purpose, where we occasionally give things up or we give up activities like chocolate. Simple. We give up chocolate, we deny ourselves, we deny self chocolate in order to lose weight, something I need to do. And some deny themselves buying things in order to save money.

And they're looking for a holiday. They don't buy this good thing because they're looking forward to the holiday. And to that extent, that is self denial. But of course, that's not what Jesus is talking about. Because self denial is not the same as denying self. Denying self places all the emphasis upon self. It places the responsibility upon the individual person. Because it's not about denying ourselves chocolate or spending money. It's about removing ourselves from the center of our universe. It's about removing ourselves from the throne of our own heart.

[16 : 36] Denying self is about giving ourselves up and writing ourselves off and surrendering our life to Jesus Christ and being determined to be obedient to his will. Because our fallen nature, our sinful nature that we're born with, we were singing that in Psalm 51. From my birth, I have been sinful, conceived in guiltiness and sin. We're all born with a love of self, where we are the center of our universe. We are the kings and queens of our own heart and destiny.

And our sin is such that it's deluded us into thinking that we are the most important person in the world. And that everything else revolves around us. Our sin has affected and defected every area of our life. And it convinces us that we ought to worship self. Where we should boast in self, be proud of self, exalt self, promote our ego, to the point that we are convinced that we don't need anyone else to help us get through the life. And if that's the case, we certainly don't need God. We don't need Jesus. I mean, why would anyone need Jesus if we can do everything ourselves?

But you know, Jesus knows our heart. Jesus knows our mind. Jesus knows the way we think, which is why he says, whosoever desires to save his or her life, they will lose it.

They will lose it. It will profit them nothing. It will profit them nothing. But Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Whosoever wants to follow me, whosoever wants to be my disciple, if you want to be my disciple, says Jesus, then you must come and die. You must die to self. You must die to sin. You must abdicate the throne of your own heart. You must submit to the authority of King Jesus as it is presented to us in God's word. And you must put Jesus at the center of your life and follow him. You must follow him. But to follow Jesus means taking up our cross. Because in order to be a follower of this Christ, we must follow the example of this Christ by taking up our cross. But when Jesus said that if we want to become one of his disciples, then we must deny ourselves, take up his cross and follow him. When Jesus said that, in the first century, it was the most startling thing Higurah ever said. To our mind and to our ears, it doesn't seem like a big deal. We see the symbol of the cross everywhere we go. We see it in the form of jewelry, people wearing necklaces. We see it or we use it as a figure of speech, where we say that we all have our own crosses to bear.

[19 : 51] And such crosses, they may come in the form of inconvenience or illness or hard, hard experiences. And that's not to say that these things are insignificant or easy to bear, but they're so they're so vastly different to what Jesus meant in his sermon. Because the symbol of the cross in the first century was a symbol of Roman oppression. It was the most visible aspect of Rome's terror.

The act of crucifixion, the cross, it was designed to punish criminals in the most excruciating manner by prolonging their death. Because when someone was crucified, they didn't die of the pain of being lacerated and having six inch nails hammered through their hands and their feet and then hoisted up onto a cross to die. You died by suffocation because the only way to breathe when you were on the cross is to push down upon the nails in your hands and in your feet and then take a breath. And on the cross it was this fight for survival, this fight between the desire to live which is inbuilt in us all. We all want to live, the desire to live and the fear of death. That's the fight which takes place upon the cross. And the cross is an awful way to die. And for every

Jew at that time in Israel living under the oppression of the Romans, the cross was this symbol of cruelty, pain, shame and death. But not only that, when someone took up their cross, when someone carried their cross they'd be carrying it to their place of execution. And the act of carrying the cross, it signified submission to Rome and the authority of Rome's power. And here is Jesus. He's using the same symbol to signify the ultimate submission which is required to be his disciple. And with such an extreme symbol Jesus was saying that to become his disciple we must be prepared to endure trouble, pain, suffering and conflict, maybe even death. It's through much tribulation, said Jesus, that we will enter the kingdom of heaven. And you know, I love J.C. Ryle. If you ever see J.C. Ryle books, read them. If you ever get a hold of one of them, read them. The commentaries are brilliant. J.C. Ryle who was a bishop in Liverpool in the 19th century, he wrote many commentaries and this is what he says around this verse, about this verse. He says, in order to become a disciple of Jesus we must be prepared to deny self and take up the cross of doctrine and the cross of practice. We must be prepared to take up the cross of professing a faith that the world despises.

We must be prepared to take up the cross of living a life which the world ridicules as too strict and unnecessary. We must be prepared to crucify the flesh, to mortify the deeds of the body, to fight daily with the devil, to come out from the world and to lose our lives if need be for Christ's sake and the gospels. These are hard sayings, says Ryle. But the words of our Lord are plain and unmistakable. If we will not carry the cross then we shall never receive the crown.

If we will not carry the cross then we shall never receive the crown. And you know if anyone knew what it was to carry his cross it was the apostle Paul. Because when Paul wrote to the Galatians and explained how he had been converted, how he had become a Christian and the change that had taken place in his life he made this wonderful confession of what it means to be a Christian.

[24 : 08] Because he said I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live yet not I but the life that I now live in the flesh. I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. And as a Christian Paul denied self and he had taken up his cross and he had followed Jesus.

He died to self. He had died to sin. So much so that he said later in his letter to the Galatians, God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Paul counted everything that this world offered as loss that he would gain Christ as his Savior. And that's what Jesus is telling us here. That whosoever loses his life, whosoever counts what this world offers and the pleasures of this world as loss, they will gain eternal life. They will gain salvation. They will gain Christ as their Savior.

But the problem we have in our congregations is that there is far too many people trying to save their own life by clinging to the world. And maybe what holds you back from denying self and taking up your cross is all this talk about loss. But what Jesus is saying is that the loss is not a loss of possessions. It's not a loss of money or wealth or family or friends.

It's the loss of your soul. The loss of your undying soul. Because if you cling to everything, if you cling to your money, your wealth, your family, your friends, and if you put them before your eternal well-being, then you will lose your soul. And Jesus puts it so clearly to us in verse 36.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What profit will it be in eternity to have had everything that money could buy, to have had all the wealth of the world, to have had the loveliest family and the closest friends? And there's nothing wrong with any of these things. There's nothing wrong with having money or wealth or family or friends. They are the great blessings and privileges of life. But my friend, what profit will it be to you if you have spent your life neglecting your soul? And you know what I find so sad and so heartbreaking is that far too many people spend their life clinging to the things that they can't take with them.

[27 : 10] They put the trust in the things that are of no eternal benefit to their soul. And you know Jesus told a parable about someone like that. The parable of the rich fool.

He spent his life building bigger and better barns. Couldn't get enough. He'd spent his life tending to all his wealth and his gain. But what he never saw coming was what he would be asked.

He would be asked what he did with his soul. And you know when God came calling, death came knocking and he was a man who neglected his soul. And God said, fool, tonight your soul is required of you. My friend, let me ask you, what attention are you giving to your undying soul? What concern do you have for your soul?

Because what will it profit you? What gain will you have if you gain the whole world? And lose your soul? Well, what is it that you're not willing to let go of? What could you possibly be willing to cling to in this life in exchange for your precious undying soul? Well, whatever it is, whatever you're clinging to, surely you know that it won't last. Surely you know that you can't take it with you. As the old saying goes, shrouds have no pockets. You can't take it with you.

Whatever it is you're clinging to. And you know, I don't know how many times that death is going to speak to us as communities before we wake up to this reality that we need to give attention to our soul. We need to give attention to our soul. You need to start showing a concern for your soul, because in this solemn sermon of Jesus, Jesus not only wants to make us aware that there is a call to whosoever to become his disciple, but that it comes at a cost. The cost is willing, if you're willing to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus.

[29 : 45] But for Jesus, there is also a concern, a concern for whosoever. I hope you're still listening. Please give your attention to his sermon, to Jesus's sermon, because it's a sermon for whosoever.

There's a call to whosoever, a cost for whosoever, but thirdly and finally Jesus says that there is, he has a concern for whosoever, a concern for whosoever. He says in verse 38, whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation.

Of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the Holy Angels. When we consider all that Jesus said during his life in ministry, there are perhaps no words that are more condemning than these, because in the statement, Jesus highlights the very thing that holds people back from becoming one of his disciples.

And Jesus says, the reason many people hold back is shame. People are ashamed of Jesus Christ. They're ashamed to be seen to believe the things of God. They're ashamed to be known as one who loves Jesus Christ. They're ashamed before others for desiring to live according to the commandments of God. They're ashamed to be associated with Jesus and other Christians. And their shame is such that they're maybe afraid of coming to church both ends on the Lord's day. Just in case people talk about them. Just in case people begin to think that they are religious and that they've got the kourum. And Jesus says, that's why many people hold back from becoming my disciples. They're ashamed of me and they're ashamed of my words. But what's startling is that the shame arises because of the adulterous and sinful generation. The shame arises for fear of what the adulterous and sinful generation will say about them if they follow Jesus. And you know that adulterous and sinful generation it's still present today. Because how many people in our congregations and in our communities are ashamed of Jesus for the fear of what others will say about them. How many people are afraid of being embarrassed or humiliated in front of their friends if they begin to follow Jesus.

But you know what the Bible says about that my friend? It says that the fear of man is a snare. The fear of man is a snare because when we try to live our life for the opinion of others and to please others and worry about what people will say and think it'll only ensnare us. And I know what it's like. I was there myself. I was there myself when I was secretly seeking the Lord.

[33 : 06] I didn't want anyone to know. I didn't want my closest friends to know or my family to know. I was too afraid to say anything to them or for them to find out that something was going on in my heart. But do you know what took that fear away? I listened to Jesus and not the opinion of others.

Jesus said come and whatever anyone else had to say or whatever comments people had to make or opinions people had to give they would get over it. And if they sent anything negative it was only because they wanted it for themselves. But what Jesus says here is that this feeling of shame and the fear of others it's so insignificant in comparison to eternity. Because being afraid of the thoughts and opinions of this adulterous and sinful generation it's completely insignificant in comparison to the fear and terror that will be expressed when the Son of Man comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels. Being afraid of the thoughts and opinions of other people what other neighbors will say what those whom we work with will say what our friends will say about us it's completely insignificant. So small, so fleeting, so passing in compared to the great day of judgment. And in Matthew's Gospel we're given a fuller picture of what Mark is saying here because in Matthew chapter 25 Jesus says when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him he will sit on his glorious throne and will be gathered before him he will gather all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats and he'll place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left and the king will say to those on his right come you blessed of my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world and then Jesus will say to those on his left depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels and Jesus says these will go away into eternal punishment and the righteous into eternal life. I friend the day of judgment will be a day of shame it will be a day of shame because on the day of judgment all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account all will stand whosoever will stand whosoever will give an account and there will be many who stand there ashamed but they won't be ashamed of Jesus and his words they'll be ashamed that they never listened in church they'll be ashamed that they never acted when they had the opportunity they will be ashamed that they had listened to the opinions of others they will be ashamed that they never responded to the offer of whosoever they will be ashamed that they didn't take up their cross and follow Jesus and that shame which they will feel it will make the torments of hell far worse for them but my friend Jesus is reminding us in his solemn sermon but he has a concern for whosoever he has a concern for everyone because he knows that the day of judgment includes everyone and he tells us about the day of judgment and the coming and coming in the glory of us his father with his holy angels he tells us not to scare us not to manipulate us but only because he loves us only because he loves us

he doesn't want us to go to hell I don't want you to go to hell I don't want you to perish without Christ as your savior I don't want you to neglect your undying soul I want you to be saved that's my calling as a preacher that's my concern as a Christian I want you to be saved I want you to be saved and I want you I want you to know that this sermon is for you this sermon is addressed to you because it's a sermon for whosoever it's a sermon with your name on it this sermon is for you I can't say any more than that I can't add to what Jesus has said except please please please give your attention to his sermon and respond because Jesus is saying to us today whosoever desires to come after me let him take up his cross and follow me may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray