

Losing to Win
Mark 8:34-38
Rev. Brian Bill
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Video: “Me Church”

In contrast to the common thinking that life is all about you and me, listen to the words of Christ found in Mark 8:34-38: ***“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever 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.’”***

As I meditated on these words this week my mind went to something Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, which I first read as a brand new believer: *“Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.”*

As we unpack this passage, we’ll begin by considering the call to follow Jesus, we’ll then camp on four conditions Christ gave if we’re serious about following Him and we’ll conclude with three cautions.

One Call

We see Jesus’ call in verse 34: ***“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples...”*** Let’s set the context. Two weeks ago we focused on three questions from the previous passage in Mark 8:27-33:

- Who do people say Jesus is?
- Who do you say Jesus is?
- Who does Jesus say He is?

Jesus made it very clear that He ***“must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”*** After this intense teaching time, which included a public rebuke of Peter, Jesus then called the crowd and his disciples together. This word ***“call”*** means,

“to call to oneself, to summon hither, to bid to come.” He’s calling them to huddle up because he has something very important He wants them to know. After describing His fate, He describes what it means to follow Him.

Four Conditions

The call is to everyone but there are also conditions to following Christ. We see this in the use of the word, *“if.”* We’re going to discover that the demands of discipleship can’t be dismissed or downplayed.

1. Desire. The first condition is that a person must have a desire to become a disciple – *“If anyone would come after me...”* The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. The phrase, *“would come”* is the idea of intentionality and involves the will. In order to walk with Jesus you must first want to walk with Jesus. The New King James renders it like this: *“Whoever desires to come after me.”* The New American Standard puts it like this: *“If anyone wishes...”* And the New Living Translation says this: *“If any of you wants to be my follower...”*

I love that the call of Jesus goes out to everyone and to anyone – to the curious crowd (those nearby), to the committed core (the eleven) and even to the counterfeit (Judas). It strikes me that these three groups are still present today. Some of you are curious about Christ, others of you are committed to Him and a few have a counterfeit faith. Notice that Jesus is about to give the same message to each of the groups as He calls everyone to Him.

As Ray Pritchard reminded us last week, it doesn’t matter what you’ve done or how you’ve been living. Everyone is welcome – Romans 3:23 states that *“all have sinned”* and Acts 10:34 says, *“...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

Notice the phrase, *“come after me.”* This has the idea of movement, of lining up behind the Lord, following wherever He goes. We don’t walk in front of Him and ask Him to catch up with our ways and wishes. No, we get behind him, so that we walk where He walks. We walk after Him, not ahead of Him.

Do you have the desire to follow Jesus as one of his disciples? You won’t follow Him if you don’t want to. One of Beth’s sisters made a statement several years ago that we often quote in our family. It goes like this, *“people do what they want to do.”* It sounds so simple but it’s so true. Some are not following the Savior

simply because they don't have the desire to do so. Listen. Until you desire to be a disciple, you won't be one. If you desire Him more than anyone or anything else, you will be a disciple. Psalm 73:25: ***"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you."***

Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

2. Denial. The first condition is to settle your *desire*. The second condition is to deny self: ***"...let him deny himself..."*** Everything within us screams against these words. To ***"deny"*** means, ***"to refuse."*** This is the same word that describes what Peter did to Jesus. One Bible Dictionary puts it like this: ***"to disown and renounce self and to subjugate all works, interests and enjoyments."*** Check out what Jesus said in Luke 14:33: ***"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."***

Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial, like not eating chocolate, going on a Facebook fast, or not rooting for the Bears (though that would be a good idea). Denying self means I stop thinking I'm always right, I stop living in my own power and I refuse to pursue my own pleasures because I no longer belong to myself. We see this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ***"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."*** In short, I must give up the right to run my own life because I no longer own my own life. I've been bought with the blood of Christ and I now belong to Him.

John Calvin called self-denial ***"the sum of the Christian life."*** I like what Erwin Lutzer posted on New Year's Day: ***"But there is one resolution we all should make: that we will not begin a single day in the New Year without giving thanks to God, meditating on one chapter of God's Word, and praying, 'Father, glorify yourself in my life today at my expense.'"*** Most of us, me included, are fine with glorifying God, but we don't really want to do that if it costs us something. We can't fully follow Christ while living our lives any way we please.

I am so moved by the caliber and commitment of the servants who are serving at Edgewood. It's a joy to partner in disciple-making with the leadership teams God has assembled – the staff, the deacons and the trustees. Last month I attended the first trustee meeting of the year and encouraged these guys from 1 Corinthians 15:58 that their ministry matters: ***"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast,***

immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Here’s a picture of our trustees – John Bril is serving as chairman, Chris James is vice-chairman and Paul Janacek is the secretary. After reflecting on this passage I asked each of them what they hope to contribute this year. I took notes so I wouldn’t forget their answers. Listen to how this team of servants demonstrates what it means to deny self.

- *I simply want to serve*
- *I want to help*
- *I want to be available*
- *It’s my duty*
- *I have ownership of this church and want to give back*
- *I want to give my hands and feet to whatever needs to be done*
- *This is my home so I want to help*
- *I want to do what I’m gifted to do*
- *I’m grateful for what Christ has done so I want to serve*
- *I want to make things easy for the many ministries of Edgewood*
- *I want to step up and serve*
- *I’m happy to help*
- *I want to keep the building up for our guests*

I went back and listened to a song this week by Mercy Me called, “So Long, Self.” The words describe a man breaking up with himself.

*Well if I come across a little bit distant, it’s just because I am
Things just seem to feel a little bit different, you understand
Believe it or not but life is not apparently about me anyways
But I have met the One who really is worthy
So let me say...so long, self
Well, it’s been fun, but I have found somebody else
So long, self
There’s just no room for two, so you are gonna have to move
So long, self
Don’t take this wrong but you are wrong for me, farewell
Oh well, goodbye, don’t cry
So long, self*

Have you ever broken up with yourself? There really is no room for two. Either self is on the throne of your life, or the Savior is.

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3. Death. The first two conditions are *desire* and *denial*. As if those aren't difficult enough, Jesus next calls us to *die*: “...**and take up his cross...**” Crucifixion was a common Roman punishment, with over 30,000 nailed to crosses during the lifetime of Jesus. Everyone knew that the cross was an instrument of shame, suffering, torture and death. When a person took up his cross, he was beginning a death march.

Unfortunately, we have romanticized the cross and turned it into something we put on our walls or wear around our necks. When we do reference this verse, we often say something like, “*Well, I guess that's just the cross I must bear*” and normally it refers to putting up with an obnoxious relative or living with an illness or some other affliction or that a bad boss might be your cross. But let's remember that the cross was carried by condemned criminals and ended with a humiliating and excruciating execution. Everyone knew the person was saying goodbye to everything and that there was no turning back.

We're called to crucify the cult of self-fulfillment, self-promotion and self-centeredness. We're to die to our rights – the right to be right, the right to take revenge and the right to fight. As J.C. Ryle puts it: “*A religion which costs nothing, is worth nothing.*”

Interestingly, according to almost universal tradition and archaeological evidence, the apostle Peter ended up literally fulfilling this when he was crucified, reportedly upside down, for his faith in Jesus Christ. It's reported that 11 of the disciples died martyr's deaths.

Christine Hoover writes: “*Nonetheless, the cross is relentless in my life; it pursues and crucifies my claims on self-rule and self-glory. The gospel, because it is by nature sacrificial, requires my self-sacrifice...the gospel lays claim to us all. Christ lays claim to our ambitions, our money, our minds, our work, our children, and, yes, even our sexual activity. We cannot lay out for the unconverted a Christianity that will 'make life better,' when in fact faith in Jesus often makes life more difficult because the priceless value of knowing Him comes at a cost to self. We become no longer our own; everything we are and do must be submitted to*

someone else—namely Christ.”

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we live in a time of “cheap grace” and “easy believism” where Christianity is more identified with health and wealth than with surrender, sacrifice and service. Here’s another quote from the *Cost of Discipleship*: “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*”

Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

This is quite a condition, isn’t it? Do you desire to be a disciple? Are you denying yourself? Have you died to sin?

I came across this cartoon that made me smile...and then squirm.



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4. Devotion. After getting our *desire* right, *denying* self and *dying* to sin, Jesus gives the fourth condition for discipleship in the last part of verse 34: “***...and follow me.***” To “***follow***” means, “*to go with*” and the tense is ongoing, meaning we are to be constantly following Him. At the core, the word “disciple” means learner and follower.

Here’s what I’ve observed over the years: *the depth of one’s devotion will determine their impact.*

The words we use are important. While there’s nothing wrong with saying things like: “*I’m a Christian*” or “*I’m a believer*” or “*I’m a Baptist,*” I’ve been trying to

identify myself this way: *“I’m a follower of Christ.”* I’ve also found that asking someone if they are a “Christian,” is not all that helpful because almost everyone says they are. But when I ask someone if they are a Christ-follower, I find that I’m able to bridge to the gospel must quicker. When I’m speaking to a true Christian, I often will ask, *“How long you been following Christ?”*

Jesus fought against having false converts by making sure people knew there was a cost to following Him. I think of the rich young ruler in Mark 10 who came running up to Jesus to find out how to obtain eternal life. When Jesus challenged his idolatry of self and the pursuit of possessions, we read these sad words in verse 22: ***“Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”*** I find it very interesting that Jesus didn’t chase after Him or water down the demands of discipleship. Jesus doesn’t lower the bar. Commitment to Him *is* costly. Discipleship *is* demanding. The man was sad but he wouldn’t deny himself or put to death his devotion to material things.

In Matthew 10:38, Jesus said it like this: ***“And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*** Cross-bearers are called to follow the Crucified One. Discipleship is demanding because we’re called to die to our desires. Luke 9:23 adds that dying to self and to sin are to be happening on an-ongoing basis: ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”***

It’s easy to add Jesus as a friend on Facebook; it’s much more difficult to be a follower. Jesus is not an app that you add to your life. Because He’s Lord, He wants your whole life. Are you willing to renounce every person, every possession and especially yourself in order to follow Christ? Will you put your faith over your family and over anything else that has been first in your life? What is it that is keeping you from following fully? Luke 14:33: ***“So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”***

Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life. After the call to discipleship and the four conditions – desire, deny, death and devotion, Jesus concludes with three cautions.

3 Cautions

1. If you focus only on your own life, you’ll lose it. We see this in verse 35: ***“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my***

sake and the gospel's will save it.” If you try to hold on to what you have, you’ll miss what Jesus wants to give you. When you settle the surrender issue and commit to follow Christ at any cost, you will end up saving your life. We would do well to adopt the Apostle Paul’s purpose statement from Acts 20:24: ***“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”***

Don’t miss the additional clause that Mark adds: ***“but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”*** We are to lose our lives in service to the lost as we proclaim the gospel. We are to spread the good news in this community and on all the continents.

On Sunday nights we’ve been watching the “I Am N” videos to help us learn more about the sacrifices that our persecuted brothers and sisters are making as they are being persecuted for their faith.

When we lose that which has always been so important to us, we end up finding that which we’ve been searching for all along. Speaking of those who are completely committed to Christ, Revelation 12:11 says: ***“...for they loved not their lives even unto death.”*** That reminds me of the words of Jim Elliot, a missionary who was martyred in Ecuador: *“He is no fool who gives what He cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”* Incidentally, he wrote these words when he was in his 20s!

2. If you focus only on your own success, you’ll lose your soul. Jesus asks two probing questions in verses 36-37: ***“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?”*** Jesus is using economic terms here – profit, forfeit and return. You could gain everything and lose your very soul. You could make a lot and end up in hell.

Here’s a question to ponder: *Will I spend my life for the Savior or will I waste my life on this world?*

3. If you’re ashamed of Christ, He’ll be ashamed of you. Look at verse 38: ***“For whoever 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.”*** There is a cost to discipleship but there’s an even greater cost to not following Christ. We’re called to confess Christ

and not be ashamed of Him, which will become increasingly more difficult in our culture in the months and years to come. One way to confess and profess Christ is through believer's baptism.

Let's not shrink back from the Savior. Let's not waffle with His words as we live in this adulterous and sinful generation. Don't bail on the One who will never fail you. It's time for the church to be the church, to be bold in our witness and loving in our gospel presentations.

Let's declare with Paul in Romans 1:16: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*** When Paul was in prison, he wrote these words of encouragement to a young Christ-follower in 2 Timothy 1:8: ***“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.”***

On Friday I read an article posted on Christianity Today called, “Dying to Self and Living for Christ: Why We Must Surrender and Sacrifice Daily in Order to Know Jesus More.” I really liked her main points so want to pass them along.

1. Surrender Spontaneously. Each day we encounter small, unexpected invitations to surrender. Our mistake comes when we consider these invitations as inconsequential or trivial. Rather, it is these daily invitations to deny ourselves and surrender our wants that prepare us for the larger risks and invitations God may ask of us in the future.

- Will you pause to have a conversation with the neighbor you always wave to through the car window as you speed off to your next activity?
- Will you set aside your to-do list in order to sit with a friend through his or her pain and tragedy?

2. Sacrifice Strategically. While we have daily, unexpected opportunities to stretch our muscle of sacrifice, there are also ways we can strategically place ourselves in situations that cause us to grow in our perseverance to further the Kingdom of God on earth.

- Will you give of your time to plug into a Growth Group this year?
- Will you schedule time in your week to serve with a ministry like World Relief, 180, Pregnancy Resources, Youth Hope or Safe Families?

- Will you give sacrificially and joyfully from the resources God has entrusted to you?
- Will you wake up early to read the word of God? Our February Bible Reading Plan will focus on helping us Walk by Faith. We'll be reading through Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

About five years ago our previous church gave me a sabbatical and sent Beth and I on an all-expense paid study trip to Israel. I know I've talked about this before but there's something I haven't shared. Two friends of ours, who both have their PhDs and serve at a Cru Seminary in Asia, led this trip. Around 20 of their students were on the trip, coming from about 5 countries in Asia. These students were all in their 20s and 30s and were sold-out to Christ. They knew salvation was free and that discipleship was costly.

One of the young men had served on a team of missionaries in Turkey and had witnessed several of his teammates become martyrs for their faith. His prayer while he was in Israel was to ask God if He wanted him to go back to Turkey. When our trip was winding down we were on a bus traveling to another site and I decided to sit next to this brother. I asked him some questions and he proceeded to tell me that God was leading him back to Turkey. My eyes filled with tears and I didn't know what to say. I remember excusing myself and going back to sit with Beth.

I told her that he had made the decision to go back to Turkey, knowing that He too could be martyred for his faith. I remember saying something like this to Beth, *"He's going back knowing that he could die."* And then I caught myself and said, *"Actually, he's already died and that's why he's going back."*

His commitment to Christ and His joyful desire, denial of self, death for the Savior and devotion really impacted us. Coupled with all that we were experiencing walking where Jesus walked, Beth and I later prayed something like this: *"Lord, we're all in. Whatever you want us to do, wherever you want us to do it, we're surrendered to you."* When we prayed this prayer we were thinking that God wanted us to step it up where we were living in Livingston County. But it was that prayer that eventually led us to accept the invitation to come to the Quad Cities to partner with each of you in gospel proclamation as we live on mission for Christ by gathering, growing, giving and going.

The call to discipleship is costly, but totally worth it!

After I became a follower of Christ when I was in college, I read a booklet by Campus Crusade for Christ (now called Cru) that showed the difference between a life that's lived with self on the throne and the life with Christ on the throne. The self-directed life is filled with guilt, worry, discouragement, fear and disobedience while the Christ-directed life is filled with love, joy, peace, patience, trust and obedience.

What about you? Is self on the throne of your life or is the Savior? Will you go where He goes? Will you stay where He stays? When He moves, will you move?

Edgewood is not a "Me Church." This is a church made up of sold-out followers of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Closing Song: "I Will Follow"

Membership Introduction: Dave and Becky Houk (2nd Service)