

The Normal Christian Life: Following and Serving the King

Mark 8:27-38

Introduction: 1) What you think and believe about Jesus will determine how you serve Him and how you live out your life. It is inevitable that the former will impact the latter. If, like Robert Funk of the infamous and dying “Jesus Seminar” movement, you think he was “a subversive sage” whose “witticisms tended to undermine the everyday view of things,” you will admire him but you will not worship Him. Or if, like Susan Haskins, you think “he was a feminist,” you will applaud his advocacy of women’s rights and pursue an egalitarian agenda that will significantly impact your thinking on church, marriage and family. Or, if like Bart Erhman, you think he was “a first century apocalyptic prophet who expected the imminent end of his [world]”, you will conclude He was wrong, did not rise from the dead, and even compare Him, at least in part, to the Hal Lindsey’s of Church history (*Jesus, Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 244-45).

2) But there is another faulty perspective of Jesus that is far more dangerous and seductive, especially for the people in our churches, a Jesus exposed by David Platt in his book *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*. In a December 23, 2010, “CNN Belief Blog”, David writes, “We American Christians have a way of taking the Jesus of the Bible and twisting him into a version of Jesus that we are more comfortable with. A nice middle-class American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn’t mind materialism and would never call us to give away everything we have. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who for that matter wants us to avoid danger altogether. A Jesus who brings comfort and prosperity to us as we live out our Christian spin on the American Dream.”

3) Any fair and honest reading of Scripture will reveal that this is not who Jesus is and it is not what Jesus demands. Indeed the text before us could not make things more clear. Bottomline: Jesus says know me, trust me, follow me, and die.

Transition: 1) This text naturally divides into 3 movements with distinct but related themes. It will provide the answer to 3 crucial questions: 1) Who is Jesus? 2) What did He come to do? 3) What is my proper response? 2) It is the beginning of the “Great Discipleship Discourse” (8:31-10:52) which has a very distinctive structure.

- 3 times Jesus predicts His passion (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34).

- 3 times immediately following He instructs them concerning true discipleship and what it means to truly follow him, because they just do not get it! In 8:32 Peter tries to correct him on what kind of Messiah He will be. In 9:34 they are debating greatness in the kingdom. And in 10:37 James and John beat the others in asking to sit on His right hand and left hand in the kingdom.

Thus our Lord informs them and us what the normal Christian life looks like and what it means to follow and serve the King, a King who came to die and serve; a King who calls His followers to die and serve too.

I. You must know and personally confess who Jesus is. 8:27-30

- Jesus carries the 12 almost 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee for a time of private instruction. Caesarea Philippi is an unlikely location for the first human proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. In the outer regions of paganism, idolatry and hostility to the Hebrew faith, Jesus is first proclaimed as the Christ. Mark says they are “on the way”, a phrase that occurs 9 times in chps. 8-12 and draws attention to the prophetic “the way of the Lord” in Mark 1:2-3. “The way of the Lord” has been prepared (by

John the Baptist) and now the Lord is on the way to His predetermined destiny and the cross.

- We are at a crucial turning point in Mark's gospel.
- As Jesus brought gradual physical sight to the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), He will now bring gradual, spiritual sight to the disciples concerning who He is and what kind of Messiah he will be.

1) There is an inescapable question. 8:27-28

- Jesus asks a simple and straight forward question (v. 27). It is a question the 12 have pondered since he calmed the sea in 4:41: "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"
- The disciples respond with a number of popular opinions making the rounds. We see these same judgments back in Mark 6:14-16.
 - John the Baptist – a view represented by Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14-15), who believed Jesus was John raised from the dead.
 - Elijah – the prophetic forerunner before the eschatological "Day of the Lord" (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6).
 - One of the prophets – perhaps the one promised by Moses in Deut 18:15, 18.
- These were stellar, outstanding assessments to be sure. Each is positive and affirming. Much like those who today would applaud him as a great moral teacher, the example who all should seek to emulate. They honor Him but

misrepresent Him. They applaud Him while denying Him for who He really is.

Transition: This is an inescapable question and it demands an accurate and acceptable answer. “Who do people say that I am?”

2) There is one acceptable answer. 8:29-30

- Jesus now shifts the question to His disciples and makes “the question of the ages personal in v. 29, “But who do you say that I am?”
- Accurate declarations of who Jesus is has been given so far by: Mark the narrator (1:1), “Jesus Christ, the Son of God”; God the Father (1:9), “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased”; and demons (1:25), “the Holy One of God”, (3:11) “You are the Son of God”, (5:7) “Jesus, Son of the Most High God.”
- Now the voice of Peter is added, “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.” For Mark’s purposes the complementary declaration (“Truly this man was “the Son of God”) will come at the end of his gospel from the mouth of a Gentile, Roman centurion.
- At the center of Mark’s gospel we have the one and only acceptable answer concerning the identity of Jesus. Peter and the 12 reject the prevailing opinions of the crowds and religious leaders (note their negative evaluation in 3:22!), and so must we!
- Popular and trendy views of Jesus must always surrender to the clear and consistent witness of Scripture and the apostolic church. James Edwards is right, “The categories of John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets are

no closer to the real Jesus than are the various “Jesus” figures of historical criticism or Enlightenment rationalism or feminism or Aryan and racist theories or the Jesus Seminar or the various sociological models in our day” (*Mark*, 248). Buck the trends! Stand on the Word against the assaults!

- Personally, publicly and even proudly declare your allegiance to Jesus proclaiming He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the one and only Savior of the world. There is no room for vacillation or compromise for the one who follows Jesus.

II. **You must learn and affirm the ways of God not man. 8:31-34**

- These are hinge verses connecting the first part of Mark and the second half. Mark 1:1-8:30 has led to the confession “You are the Christ.” Mark 8:31-16:8 will lead to the confession “You are the Son of God” and reveal the kind of Messiah He will be, a Suffering Messiah, something hinted at previously in 1:11 and 2:20, but now made plain in 8:32.
- Now that we are clear on who Jesus is, Jesus will make clear what He came to do (see 10:45).
- I am indebted to Tim Keller at this point.

First Half – Who He Is

“Gospel”: “The King has come!” Our response: “Repent and believe.”

1st Confession: By an “insider” – Peter: “You are the Christ.” (8:29).

Second Half – What He came to do

“Gospel”: “The King must die!” Our response: “Take up your cross and follow Him.”

2nd and Climatic Confession: By an outsider – Gentile, Roman Centurion: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (15:39).

- A King who dies is not what they expected. It is not what they wanted. It is, however, what they and we all desperately needed. Look carefully at what we learn.
- 1) God’s ways are often hard but clear. 8:31-32
- Jesus begins a new chapter in the disciples’ education. It is time for them to graduate from elementary to high school, even if they are not ready.
 - Jesus is the Christ, the Davidic Son of Psalm 2, the apocalyptic Son of Man of Daniel 7. He will usher in an eternal Kingdom over which He will rule and reign as King and Lord. However, God’s way will be different than they had anticipated and what a world that exalts power would expect: 1) He will suffer many things, 2) Be rejected, especially by the religious establishment, 3) Be killed, 4) Rise 3 days later.
 - All of this must happen. It is necessary. It is essential.
 - It is what the Scriptures promised.
 - This is why He came.
 - This is what sin’s payment demands and we cannot provide.
 - This is where the law of God and the love of God will meet!
 - This is where judgment and grace kiss!
 - Rob the word “must” of its meaning and you empty the gospel and the cross of its glory. God’s ways are often hard but clear.
- 2) God’s will is often a challenge but perfect. 8:32-33

- Peter was on board with Jesus as the Christ. Peter was not on board with Jesus going to the Cross. As Jesus rebuked the demons in 3:12, He now receives the same from Peter in 8:32. Peter calls Him out. That was a bad call on Peter's part!
- Peter apparently spoke up for all the disciples as implied by v. 33. He quickly gets in return what he had just given ("rebuke" is the same Greek word) and more!
- "Get behind me Satan!" (imp. of command). Jesus treats Peter like he was Satan, a demon-possessed man! It is harsh but justified and necessary. Like Satan at the temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:9-11), he offers Jesus the crown without the cross. He has a better plan than God does.
- Like so many then and today, he wants a Jesus who fits his agenda. He wants a Christ on his terms! He knows the kind of Messiah Jesus needs to be and attempts to reshape and redefine Him to fit his conception.
- Application: Are we not often guilty of doing the exact, very same thing? Serve how, where, I want! Give me a Jesus I can control, one I conjure up in my image and likeness! No, you and I must learn and affirm the ways of God not man. You may not fully understand it. It may not be easy or safe. It will, however, be best. In fact, it will be perfect (Rom. 12:2).

III. You must understand and accept that Jesus calls you to deny yourself and die for His sake and the gospel's. 8:34-38

- God's ways are often hard but usually clear. They are a challenge but always perfect. The passion of the Christ reinforces these biblical truths.

- Now, how must we respond? Confident that God's will is perfect, even if it might not be safe, we embrace the call of Jesus to follow Him and to die in order that we and others might truly live! Note the 3-fold nature of our dying.

1) The self-centered life must be put to death. 8:34

- Jesus calls to Himself the 12 and the crowd that continues to follow Him and lays out the essence of the normal Christian life, the basics of discipleship, what sadly in our day looks like “the radical Christian life”.

- Being Jesus' disciple requires 3 essentials. They are not negotiable.

1) Deny yourself, 2) Take up the cross, 3) Follow Me.

1) Deny yourself – Give up the right to self-determination. Live as Christ directs.

Treasure and value Jesus more than yourself, your plans, your comforts, your goals, your aspirations. Put to death the idol of I! Say no to you and yes to Jesus!

2) Take up your cross – Die! Luke 9:23 adds “daily” because that is what we must do.

Be honest: deciding to die is not normal or natural. However, it is necessary to be Christ's disciple. And, it is not a quick death. It is a slow death, a painful death.

3) Follow Me! Are we willing to believe Jesus? Are we willing to obey Jesus? It will be radical not comfortable because it involves a death to the self-centered life.

2) The safe-life must be put to death. 8:35

- Verses 35-38 all begin with the work “for.” Jesus is now providing the basis or the foundation for the challenge of v. 34. [Read v. 35].
- Save or treasure your life, your soul, above all else, and you will lose it. The one who plays it safe and considers his existence more important than Jesus will lose both Jesus and his eternal life.

- In contrast, the one who loses or gives his life for Jesus “and the gospel” will actually save it! Only Mark adds “the gospel.” Jesus plainly says that following Him involves risking it all, safety, security, satisfaction in this world and life. But, in the end, He promises us that it leads to a reward this world can never, ever offer.
 - There is a life worth giving for the glory of God and the gospel! It is a dying to self that others might live! It is risking it all for the sake of Christ and others! It is not safe! But it is the normal Christian life! J. I Packer says, “There are, in fact, two motives that should spur us constantly to evangelize. The first is love to God and concern for His glory; the second is love to man and concern for his welfare.” (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL Intervarsity Press, 1961, 73).
 - C. T. Studd (1860-1931), missionary to China, India and later the Sudan said it so beautifully, ... “we will dare to trust our God ... and we will do it with His joy unspeakable singing aloud in our hearts. We will a thousand times sooner die trusting only in our God than live trusting in man” (*Radical*, 178).
 - John Piper adds, “world evangelization is no longer an option in which the super zealous can gain extra brownie points...God will always cause His true people around the globe [and in this room] to give up their lives for the gospel.”
- 3) The self-serving life must be put to death. 8:36-38
- Your life is set free to live the normal/radical Christian life when you see death as reward, when you can say with Paul, “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).
 - Vs 36 Question (read) Answer: Nothing

Vs 37 Question (read) Answer: Nothing

Illustration on 4-17-98 Linda McCartney, wife of Paul McCartney of the Beatles died. *Newsweek* concluded as article on her death by saying, “The McCartney’s had all the money in the world,” said a tourist who stopped to take in the atmosphere outside the ranch. “Enough to afford their privacy. Enough to give them a beautiful view. But all the money in the world wasn’t enough to keep her alive.”

- Jesus concludes the 1st major lesson on discipleship in v. 38 [read]. Again, I appreciate the way John Piper puts it, “What’s the opposite of being ashamed of somebody? Being proud of them. Admiring them. Not being embarrassed to be seen with them. Loving to be identified with them.

So Jesus is saying, “If you are embarrassed by me and the price I paid for you (and he’s not referring to lapses of courage when you don’t share your faith, but a settled state of your toward him)—if you’re not proud of me and you don’t cherish me and what I did for you—if you want to put yourself with the goats that value their reputation in the goat herd more than they value me, then that’s the way I will view you when I come. I will be ashamed of you, and you will perish with the people who consider me an embarrassment.” (3-28-10).

Conclusion: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor who was hanged by Nazi Germany just prior to the end of World War II. His book *The Cost of Discipleship* is a classic. He understood what the normal Christian life should look like. He got it when it comes to following and serving the King whose name is Jesus. The way may be hard. But the path and the end is glorious. Listen to his challenge.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the

attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life. The call to discipleship, the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ means both death and life. (p.99)

May all of us learn how to die for Christ and the gospel, that we, and others, may truly live.

May all of us learn what is and how to live the normal Christian life.