



WESTLAKE HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Buried Treasure”

Sermon Series: “The High Cost of Discipleship”

Mark 8:34-9:1

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April 11, 2010

Mark 8:34-9:1 (New International Version)

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Mark 9

¹And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

Footnotes:

- a. [Mark 8:35](#) The Greek word means either life or soul; also in verse 36.
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Introduction.

This past Christmas, Neiman Marcus unveiled their 2009 edition of the renowned [Christmas Book](#), offering customers the ultimate in cutting-edge, dream-fulfilling [gifts](#). First published in 1926 as a 16-page booklet, the Christmas Book was initially intended as a Christmas card to the store's best customers, but it has evolved into a legendary source for very expensive, alluring and mystical gifts. Among the highlights of this year's catalog:

- * His & Hers Gift Package: An [ICON A5](#) sport aircraft with custom trailer and sport pilot license training for two. The ICON A5 features an amphibious hull and landing gear to take off and land just as easily on water as on the ground. Cost: \$250,000!
- * An Algonquin Round Table Experience. It is an exclusive dinner party at NYC's legendary [Algonquin Hotel](#) with guests including a Who's Who of famous people. Proceeds go to charity. Cost: \$200,000!
- * A 2010 [Jaguar](#) XJL Neiman Marcus Limited Edition. Only 50 were made. The car features a supercharged 5-liter V8 engine that delivers 470 hp, a custom interior of butter-soft navy and ivory leather and Zebrano matte wood accents, and includes a five-piece set of matching Jaguar luggage in navy blue leather. Cost: \$105,000!

Did anyone receive these as Christmas gifts this past year? If you did, can I have a ride?! It's amazing how expensive the simple pleasures in life can be these days, eh?!

The cost of these things is pretty amazing. But I would suggest to you that none of the unique gifts and one-of-a-kind experiences offered in the Neiman Marcus Christmas Book is as expensive as the high cost of discipleship which Jesus talked about in our passage this morning. The reason? Jesus asked His disciples to give Him everything they had.

"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul" (Mk. 8:34-36).

These words may be hard to hear, but they are even more difficult to live out. However, I believe they describe the path of discipleship for the one who would follow Jesus, and they are the key to finding joy, meaning and purpose in this life. Let's look briefly at each of these three steps Jesus mentions.



I. Deny Yourself.

We don't like to hear the phrase, "Deny yourself." We prefer the words, "Satisfy yourself!" All day long our culture tells us to indulge ourselves, and we've bought into that message. "You deserve a break today! You only go around once in life! Master the moment! You can have it all!" Self-denial seems to be the opposite of self-actualization, which the world tells us we need to achieve. However, as Jesus pointed out, we cannot fully actualize ourselves until we deny and lose our selves in Him.

Self-denial does not mean we have to become ascetics who no longer enjoy the pleasures of life. Nor does it mean we should become a doormat so people walk all over us. Rather, to deny yourself means to disown one's claim to one's life. In the original language of the New Testament, the Greek word translated "deny" means "to disown" or "to renounce." What Jesus is asking us to do is to give up the ownership of our lives in order that Jesus might take control and possess our hearts fully. In asking us to deny ourselves, our Lord is not inviting us to self-hatred as some people mistakenly think. Rather, Jesus is asking us to change the ownership of our lives and give up control and allow Him to be in charge. It is only by denying ourselves that we can become our best and truest selves as God intended.

Here's a little diagram. The chair represents the throne of one's life. The first slide is the Self-Directed Life. For most people, this describes their lives. Self is on the throne, and everything in life is oriented around meeting my needs, my wants, my desires. Jesus is on the outside, represented by the cross, and if He happens to be on the inside of one's life we tend to think even He's there to bless us and help us experience the good life. However, the next slide represents the follower of Jesus – the Christ-Directed Life. When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, they take the Self off the throne, and they allow Christ to take His rightful place as the Lord of their life.

Before I became a Christian, I remember how afraid I was of all I would have to give up to become a follower of Jesus. I was afraid of losing control, and I desperately wanted hold onto the reigns of my life. But I realized I'd made a mess of things on my own, and perhaps it was time to let God have a go of it and give Him the control He requested. So I took the first step and gave over the reigns of my life. It was the best decision I ever made.

When was the last time you denied yourself something? We've just come through the season of Lent when many people give up something good to achieve something better. These little steps of self-denial are important in the way of Christ and the path of discipleship. The first step in discipleship is to deny oneself.

II. Take Up Your Cross.

Earlier in Mark 8, on the heels of Peter's bold confession of faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, our Lord predicted His rejection by the Jewish leaders and His death upon the cross. When Peter rebuked the Lord because such talk did not fit into the disciple's notion of the triumph he envisioned for Jesus, our Lord blasted Peter and said, "*You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men!*" (8:33). Then, our text tells us, Jesus called the crowd together along with the disciples, and He began to talk about their own spiritual crucifixions and the way each of them needed to take up their cross and follow Him.

In calling His disciples to take up their cross, Jesus used a powerful image to talk about the process of discipleship. It was only after the resurrection that the disciples began to fully understand what Jesus meant by these words, but it must have been shocking to hear them the first time Jesus said this. The cross brought fear into the hearts of millions, and it was the cruelest form of capital punishment known to humankind.

To take up one's cross means that one intentionally chooses the way of death. It is a dying to self and living to Christ, as the apostle Paul put it in Romans 6 and Ephesians 4. There are certain things which are lost by being kept, and saved by being spent. To follow Jesus means death. There's no getting around it. Maybe not crucifixion in the literal sense, but the coming to the end of our selves, our expectations, and our dreams. God must bring us to that end of them in order to bring us to the beginning of real life in Jesus Christ.

Years ago when Lorie and I were engaged, I went for a run one day. During that run I began to daydream about all I wanted to do in the cause of Christ. I was in seminary preparing to be a pastor, and I had great



visions for my ministry. When I got back from the run, I shared with Lorie all the things I had in my mind and heart, and I went on and on about how I was going to do this, and how I was going to do that for the Lord.

At the end of my sharing, Lorie sensed my dreams were too full of Peter and not enough of Jesus, and she looked straight at me and quietly said, "You know, Peter, the only vision you should really have for yourself is the cross of Christ and to be crucified with Him."

Ouch! But she was right. The Lord knew I needed a wife who would speak truth into my life regardless of how hard it might be to hear!

On several occasions since that time I have sensed God was calling me to put to death my dreams, whether they were dreams for my kids, my marriage, or dreams for my ministry – all the things that mean the most to me in this world. I had put Self back on the throne, I was spiritualizing my own wants and desires, and I had to confess I was trying to control things and I wasn't allowing God to have His way.

What dreams do you need to put to death today? Where is God calling you to sacrifice your agenda and your desires? How might He be calling you to take up your cross and follow Him this morning? When Jesus told His disciples to take up their crosses, He was saying, "If you really want to live, you've got to die to yourself. That's when you'll find the secret to real life and joy."

III. Follow Me.

During World War II, B-17 bombers made long flights from the U.S. mainland to the Pacific island of Saipan. When they landed there, the planes were met by a jeep bearing the sign: "Follow Me!" That little vehicle guided the giant planes to their assigned places in the parking area.

One pilot made an insightful comment: "That little jeep with its quaint sign always reminds me of Jesus. He was [a lowly] peasant, but the giant men and women of our time would be lost without His direction."ⁱ

Following Jesus is the daily experience of the Christian life, the moment-by-moment journey of faith with Jesus down the path of life. To follow Jesus means:

We go where He goes.

We do what He does.

We feel what He feels.

We care as He cares.

We see what He sees.

We do not choose our destination. He does.

We do not set the conditions. He does.

We do you choose our jobs. He does.

Because it is Jesus who is in charge, and we seek to follow Him.

In World War II there was a platoon of American soldiers who were stranded on one side of a mine field they needed to cross. The commander came up with a plan: one man would walk across the mine field, leaving clear footprints for others to follow. If this first man hit a mine, then another man would walk across the field in his footsteps, until finally someone had cleared a path for all the other soldiers.

With their hearts in their throats, the young soldiers agreed to the plan. But which one would be chosen to walk the field first? To their surprise, the commander began walking across the field himself. As their leader, he insisted on risking his life for the sake of his men. The commander crossed the field safely, and following closely in his footsteps, all the soldiers made it across.

That is the way of Jesus. We follow in His footsteps being careful to attend His way knowing the path He has chartered for us is the surest and safest way ahead. It is the best way to avoid the land mines of life, which can take a leg off, and it is the best course to follow.

Conclusion.

During the rise of Nazi power in 1937, a young German theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it he writes:



“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves...the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship.

“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.... It is costly because it costs a man [Jesus] his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.... When God calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

One of my favorite authors, Elizabeth Elliot, spoke at the Urbana Missions Conference which Lorie attended many years ago. In her address she said this.

"High in the mountains of North Wales in a place called Llanymawddwy, lives a shepherd named John Jones with his wife Mari and his black and white dog Mack. I stood one misty summer morning in the window of their farmhouse watching John on horseback herding the sheep with Mack.... Mack, a champion Scottish collie, was in his glory. He came from a long line of working dogs, and he had sheep in his blood. This was what he was made for, this was what he was trained to do...."

"Do the sheep have any idea what's happening?' I asked Mari. 'Not a clue!' she said. 'And how about Mack?' I can't forget Mari's answer: 'The dog doesn't understand the pattern - only obedience.'"

"...In that Welsh pasture in the cool of that summer morning, what I saw was far more than blind obedience. I saw acted out... two creatures who were in the fullest sense 'in their glory.' A man who had given his life to sheep, who loved them and loved his dog, and a dog whose trust in that man was absolute, whose obedience was instant and unconditional, and whose very meat and drink was to do the will of his master. He never stopped wagging his tail. 'I delight to do thy will,' was what Mack said, 'Yea thy law is within my heart.'"ⁱⁱ

To follow Jesus means to deny oneself, take up one's cross, follow the Lord, and glory in His will. That is the high cost of discipleship.

I want to close this morning with a prayer by Richard Alliene that was used by John Wesley in a Covenant Service of the Methodist Church in 1755. May it serve as our prayer this morning. Let us pray.

"I am no longer my own, but Yours. Put me to what You will, rank me with whom You will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for You or laid aside for You, exalted for You or brought low for You; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - You are mine, and I am Yours. So be it. And the Covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

ⁱ Vernon Grounds.

ⁱⁱElizabeth Elliott, "The Glory of God's Will" in *Declare His Glory Among The Nations*, pp. 129-131.

