

**Welcome:** Now, if you're just joining us, we're in a series of messages called *Encounters with Jesus*. Each week, we're looking at accounts in the gospels where ordinary men and women encountered Jesus Christ with all of their hopes, dreams, and questions about life and faith. And after spending time with Jesus, they walked away deeply changed!

One of the fascinating details about the gospels is that the people who spent time with Jesus asked all of the same questions we're asking 2,000 years later!

**Even more fascinating is how often they misunderstood the answers He gave!**

One of the greatest pieces of evidence that shows us that the gospels are historically reliable is that the author's frequently describe these really personal, embarrassing, mud-on-my-face moments. Commentators agree that if the biblical authors were fabricating stories to make Jesus out to be someone that he wasn't, they would never include these kinds of details!

**Peter:** For example, the *Gospel of Mark* was written by a man named, John Mark, who wrote on behalf of the Apostle Peter! So, the gospel is actually Peter's eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life passed through his interpreter, Mark.

Now...right in the middle of today's text in Mark, chapter 8, Jesus is announcing to his disciples that he will suffer terrible things by the Jewish leaders and ultimately be killed by his own people. And Peter...this rugged, outspoken, blue-collar, Gloucester lobsterman...doesn't like this because it doesn't jive with his understanding of who Jesus is supposed to be. So Peter actually takes Jesus aside and begins to reprimand him! He tries to correct the Son of God, which is never going to play in your favor! And Jesus responds to Peter by saying...(33)

*"Get away from me, Satan!...You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."* Mark 8:33

Listen...if Jesus calls you Satan and tells you to get away, that's a bad day! Peter would have never encouraged Mark to include this in his gospel if it didn't really happen! But Peter does include it and eventually goes on to give his life for the same Jesus that called Him Satan, which shows us just how reliable Mark's gospel actually is...

**And here's why I believe that Peter includes it!** We're just like him! We misunderstand Jesus too, don't we? And the church has misunderstood Jesus at times, hasn't it? And our culture misunderstands Jesus, right!

**Like the people who spent time with Jesus, we want to know *who He is...what He came to do...and what He wants us to do...but we don't always understand His answer...and even when understand it, like Peter, we don't always like it!***

If I were to ask you, *"What does it mean to be a Christian, how would you answer?*

*Some of us might say... "To be a Christian means devoting my life to religion and spirituality, or attending a church and practicing the sacraments. Being a Christian means following Jesus' teachings and example in hopes of becoming the best person I can possibly be."*

This misunderstanding of what it means to follow Jesus has kept many people away from Him, and has set others on a dead-end path of frustration and failure! You see...if your goal is to live your life exactly like Jesus did in hopes that God will smile at you, you're climbing Mount Everest naked...ok! You won't make it! **Have you looked at Jesus' life?** When he was wrongfully accused, He turned the cheek. He remained silent when slandered. He embraced those who rejected him. He ate with the man who arranged his murder and forgave those who killed him. Is that how you treat people who try to kill you? This isn't junior varsity spirituality; this is the Son of God living a life of complete and joyful commitment to the Father! If that's the path you're on (earning God's favor), it will kill you!

See...what we really need is for Jesus to take us aside, like he did Peter, to correct our misunderstandings and to show us Who He is and what it means to follow Him!

**This is exactly what Jesus does in Mark, chapter 8. In short...he tells us what it means to be a Christian! Look at verse 34...**

*"Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" Mark 8:34-37*

Let's be honest...this is a bad way to draw crowds! Restore sight to the blind, cure the leper, feed thousands, cast out demons and send them into herds of pigs (very cool)...raise the dead to life...that's how you draw a crowd. And Jesus did all of those things!

Yet, right in the middle of his ministry, when the crowds were starting to swell and His popularity was beginning to grow, Jesus preached a line-in-the-sand message! He literally said, *"If you want to follow me, you must stop living self-serving, self-centered lives, and carry your cross!"*

**What does Jesus mean by, "Carry your cross"?**

**Cross:** This is one place where modern listeners tend to misunderstand Jesus because we imagine he's speaking idiomatically. People will say... *"This nagging illness is my cross."* Or, *"I come from a dysfunctional family, or have a deadbeat spouse...they're my cross."* Or, *"My cross is this destructive habit or tendency!"* In our culture, bearing a cross stands for the difficulty or adversity we face in life.

But that's not what Jesus was saying at all...and everyone standing in the crowd that day would have known it!

**For them (and for many of our brothers and sisters around the world today), Jesus' words were literally a matter of life and death.** In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, crucifixion was an everyday reality. It was where the worst of the worst criminals were executed to show what happened to enemies of Rome. Within a few decades after Jesus' crucifixion, around the time Mark wrote his gospel, Roman emperors began to persecute Christians by impaling them, covering them in tar, and lighting them on fire to discourage others from bowing their knee to Jesus instead of to Caesar. The crowds understood what Jesus meant by, *"taking up one's cross."* The cross was a place of death.

**Ask yourself, "What did the cross symbolize for Jesus?"** On the cross, Jesus relinquished all control and power and in weakness and suffering gave Himself in sacrificial love for the good of all humanity, including his executioners.

**When Jesus calls us to carry our cross and follow Him, the first thing He's saying is, "If you want to follow me (Christian)...your affection for me must be greater than your affection for anything or anyone else. I want you to love me so much that you're willing to carry a cross for me!"**

To bring this home, let me give you both a little theological insight...and some practical application!

**Author Tim Keller points out in his book, "King's Cross",** that when Jesus says, *"If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it,"* the Greek word Jesus uses for "life" is the word *psyche*, from where we get the English word *psychology*. *It refers to one's identity and selfhood.*

**By using this word, Jesus is saying, *“Don’t build your identity on the things of this world because in the end, they’ll never fully satisfy and when you lose those things, you’ll lose your self in the process!***

The world will tell you that if you want to be somebody significant, you need to be smart, have a good education, and be successful in your career. You need to be beautiful, have an attractive lifestyle or an attractive family! You need approval! **These are what we look to for our identity!**

**So, the reason Jesus’ call is so radical at first is because it threatens the deeply ingrained values of our culture and priorities of our hearts!**

In the kingdom of God, influence is gained not by getting power, but by giving our lives away in humble service toward others. True wealth is not determined by how much we accumulate, but by how richly we love our neighbors. Significance isn’t determined by how we look, but by whose we are...in Christ, we’re children of the King!

Jesus’ call to carry a cross is a call to be willing to die to the values and priorities of our world, and take up a whole new set of priorities and values!

**What does this mean? Let’s get very practical...**

**Let’s apply Jesus’ words to marriage for a moment!**

**Fighting:** Beth and I argue far less than we did early on in our marriage, but we still disagree with one another from time to time, and occasionally our disagreements become strong conversations! Now, most of the time, it’s because Beth is wrong! I’m joking! Both of us would admit to you that we’re fairly stubborn and don’t like to lose, and so most arguments come about because we’re each committed to winning!

**But if you follow Mark 8...when you disagree with your spouse and all you care about is winning...according to Jesus’ words, even if you win, you lose! The way to win in marriage is to willingly give up your pride and need to be right and care about your spouse more than a victory! Some will say... *“That’s not very fun! You’re right...Jesus says it might feel like dying, but it’s the only way to have a marriage that’s truly alive!”***

**Men...**I’ll talk to you for a moment! Jesus’ call means that next to Him, your wife is your treasure! What do you do with something you treasure? **You cherish, care for, and protect a treasure.**

Men...our culture will tell you that the way to be a man is to work long hours, be successful, win the esteem of your peers, and make good enough money to be comfortable and have a secure future. And if you're married...love your wife, but don't let marriage hinder you from playing golf and watching ESPN on the weekends.

Don't hear me wrong...I'm for hard work, a paycheck, watching ESPN and occasionally playing golf! But not if those things keep you from giving her the best of your time, mind, attention, and affection. She's a treasure...and to love her like Jesus loves her, you're going to have to be willing to die to some things in order to listen, care, encourage, and romance her, in the hopes that she will fall more in love with Jesus and grow into His fullness! **That's a Mark 8 marriage!** Ladies...I'll let you work through what that means for how you love your husband!

**Wealth – Let's apply Mark 8 to our money.** When Jesus says, *"If you want to follow me, you must turn from your selfish ways and take up your cross."* He's not suggesting we shouldn't make money or even be wealthy. But that we must die to allowing wealth define our life's affections and ambitions! **A Mark 8 economy is marked by radical, Jesus-honoring generosity! The way to know whether you're carrying a cross economically is to ask yourself, "Does my generosity hurt? Am I giving what's comfortable, or does generosity cut into my lifestyle?"** If your giving doesn't hurt, then you haven't applied Mark 8 to your resources yet.

**Independence** – One more area...we have a growing college-age, early-mid 20's crew at Harbor, which we absolutely love! If that's you...or if you're fifty trying to live like you're twenty, let me encourage you for a moment. The culture will tell you that if you want to really live, you must be ruggedly independent! Don't let anyone tell you how to live or what to do! Get what you want when you want it...and anyone who tells you differently is trying to thwart your freedom!

**But Jesus says that if you say... "My life is mine to do with what I want...you'll lose it."** God created you to experience true freedom that comes from knowing that you're fully and perfectly loved by Him...and the way to find true significance (no matter what you do with your life) is to take your talent, skills, opportunities, dreams and youthful strength and live for the good of others and for God's glory! That's where you'll find life...in taking up your cross, dying to the selfish thesis of our culture that tells you you're the center of the world, and instead, letting Jesus be the Center of your life!

In short, to be a Christian is to say, *"Jesus, I belong to you completely!"* You might say, *"That sounds hard and suffocating."*

**It can be hard, but it's not suffocating!** *It would be absolutely crazy of me to say to Beth, "Honey, I'm so glad I'm your husband...but you can't have my time, money, my affections, sexuality, or my future." I'd never say that and hope to have a marriage! It is in giving my whole self to Beth over and over that we experience true married freedom and joy!*

In the same way, a Christian who truly knows Jesus would never say, *"I'm so glad I belong to you, but these areas of my life are off-limits! You can't touch them."*

**No! A Christian says...** *"I'm yours...all of me! My friendships, my character, my career is yours, my future, my finance, my romance, my sexuality, my hopes, my dreams...all yours!"*

Now...in just the few areas we've considered, we can already see that Jesus' demands go far beyond what we can comprehend or what we're able to give, don't they?

And if you're really listening to Jesus' words, you might even be thinking, *"There's no way I could ever do this!"*

And you're right...we'll never live a life of whole-hearted and joyful devotion to Jesus unless we first see that He's only asking us to do what He's already done for us!

**Do you remember how this entire text begins? (31)**

*"Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead." Mark 8:31*

**Jesus says...before I call you to live for me, and ask you to be willing to die for me...you must first see that I died so you can live.**

**Wedding:** Next weekend at around 3pm, I'll stand up here with a man and woman who are committing their lives to one another in marriage! Now, I've had the honor of doing this for many of you, and therefore you'll know that during every ceremony, there's a moment when I turn to the bride and groom and encourage them to live out Jesus' dream for their marriage! And I read from Ephesians chapter 5; Paul's wonderful description of married love as this beautiful picture of the gospel!

**In Ephesians 5...Paul writes...**

*"For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands out to love their wives..." Ephesians 5:25-28*

After reading this text, I look at the man and say, "Bro, Jesus is calling you to love your wife as Christ loved the church. Do you know how Jesus loved the church? He died for her!" And here's this guy standing in front of his beautiful bride on the happiest day of his life and some pastor is telling him he's going to need to die to love her well! Guys, some of you are like, *"No...say it isn't so!"* But, yes...it's the only way marriage will work, and it's the only way your bride will grow into the fullness of Christ...

If you want to truly love your wife...know that sometimes sparks will fly...and sometimes love will feel like dying! Laying down your life for her beauty and wholeness.

Now...the culture will never tell you this! They never tell the bachelor this. He gets introduced to twelve, fifteen, eighteen women, I don't know (way too many for his good)...and they're like, this man is the luckiest man in the world to be surrounded by these beautiful women and he gets to choose the best one, but what they never tell him is that after the last rose is given, and the lights and cameras go off, if he wants the relationship to last for her good and for God's glory...he's going to have to die for her, figuratively, maybe literally!

That's the picture of married love that Paul gives. And there isn't a woman in the world who wouldn't say, *"If a man loved me like that, I'd give him my heart, respect, and honor!"* Every woman wants to be loved, cherished and honored like this!

But do you know what is even more extraordinary! Married love is a picture of something even greater! It's a picture of how much Jesus Christ loves you!

**In Mark 8, Jesus turned to his disciples and said... *"I must suffer and die! Because it's the only kind of love that will conquer the sin and death that is tearing you apart and will give you the life you need."***

And then...Jesus made good on his word! He died. Took rejection, criticism, lashes, thorns, and nails...all for you! His beauty in exchange for our ugliness. His strength for our weakness. His wholeness for our brokenness. His agony for our joy. He gets death, we get life! He gets punished, we get freedom. He got hell, we get heaven!

And he did it...in the words of the Apostle Paul...to make you spotless (forgiven)...holy, and without fault!

When you finally see that you have a Heavenly husband who loves you that much, your heart will be overwhelmed, and like a bride who stands before her husband on a wedding day...you'll stand before Jesus Christ and say, "I'm yours...all of me! I have no idea today how far your Lordship is going to go...but I place my life in your hands!

**Close**

**Do you know Jesus in this way? Have you ever responded to him personally...saying, *"Jesus, thank you for giving your life for me...I give my whole life to you? Please accept me on the basis of your goodness, not mine!"***

If not...tonight can be that night!

**Believers:** If you're a follower of Jesus, you know that surrender isn't something we do only one time...it's a day-by-day practice of saying to Jesus, *"My life is yours! Thank you for accepting me on the basis of your goodness, not mine!"*

**In a moment, we'll celebrate that in communion... Confession, surrender, Celebration!**

**Daily Prayer** – Finally, years ago I learned a simply prayer that helps me surrender to Jesus every day. I'll pray... *"Father, I surrender my mind, my body, my will, my emotions to you in the name of Jesus Christ!"*

Start here, then get specific with Jesus. *Today...I confess that this area of my life is outside of your Kingship because I haven't trusted you...I've rebelled against you! Today, I'm reminded of your great love for me...so I give it to you...all of me!"*

**Pray**