

Introduction

A friend of mine pastors a church, and they meet on Sunday afternoons. On Sunday mornings, he attends another church. His purpose for attending the other church is that it is a good fishing hole. There are people there that want to know God, but have not been given the gospel message. Last week, we looked at the critical question, who do you say that Jesus is? At most churches the people attending would say that Jesus is the Son of God. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah. However, in many of the churches, the gospel message is not preached. There are lots of people today attending churches that are not Jesus' disciples. They know who Jesus is, but they have never been taught how to be born again. They have never confessed Jesus as Lord and really don't know what it means to come after Jesus.

What does it mean to come after Jesus? In our passage today, Jesus gives some very clear requirements if we are going to follow Him. He did not promise a life of riches and comfort. He did not preach the prosperity gospel. Quite the opposite, He preached that to follow Him we would have to deny ourselves and take up our crosses. Chad asked me what the message was about this week. As I shared with him the message, he said it sounds like Part II. I told him it was really part III. God revealed the identity of Jesus to Peter and the disciples, and what we believe about Jesus is most important. But, believing is not enough. Jesus began sharing with them that He was going to suffer, be rejected, die, and be raised from the dead. Then, as a continuation of that thought, in our passage today He tells people that if they are going to follow Him, they must pick up their own crosses. It is one scene and conversation. Most Bibles put all these sections together. I broke them apart so that I could focus on the individual messages.

In our passage today, we will cover the critical question, "Are You Willing to Come After Me?" Jesus gave three requirements to look at when we count the cost. Then, Jesus gives us four considerations to keep in mind when we are counting the costs about making this most important decision. Let's read the text.

Are You Willing to Come After Me? (Mark 8:27-9:1)

1. Three Requirements (Mark 8:34-35)
2. Four Considerations (Mark 8:36-37)

(Mark 8:34-9:1) "And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. {35} For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. {36} For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? {37} For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? {38} For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. {9:1} "And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

1. Three Requirements (Mark 8:34)

Many times, in our evangelistic efforts, we do everything we can to get people to receive Christ. Some promise prosperity, health, and peace. As I look at Jesus' life and ministry, I see something quite different. He challenged people to count the cost before making a commitment to follow

Him. There was no “easy believism” in His message. In our passage Jesus gives three requirements for people to consider if they are going to follow Him. In Luke 14, Jesus gave some additional requirements, so this is not a comprehensive list, and it is not the only time that He asked people to count the cost; it was something very routine for Him.

In our passage today, Jesus summoned the crowd. But, instead of trying to get everyone in the crowd to sign on the dotted line, He told them to count the costs. The first requirement is that we must be willing to deny ourselves. Second, we need to take up our cross. Third, we need to follow Him. We will look at all three of these requirements as we count the costs.

(Mark 8:34) “And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

There was a preacher from Wales by the name of Ivor Powell, who wrote an excellent set of commentaries. He became ill and while he was sick, he used the time to write those commentaries. While ministering in South Africa he found that some vendors would put a false bottom in their containers and fill them to the top to give the appearance that they were full. Buyers would see the full containers and be delighted. Only later, when they reached the bottom of the container, they found that it was a false bottom and they had not received what they thought they were getting. Jesus never gave a false impression or made false promises. He promised self-denial and a cross. He told people to count the cost before making this most important decision. But, in pointing out the costs, He also gave some things to keep in mind as we contemplate whether we are going to follow Jesus.

a. Deny yourself

The first requirement that Jesus gave is to deny ourselves. What does that mean? Does it mean that we deny ourselves of food and water? Obviously not, or we would not live very long. We could deny ourselves food for a certain time period, which we call a fast. So, on a short-term basis we could deny ourselves food, water, or other needs.

Does denying ourselves means that we need to deny ourselves of all the pleasures in life? Does it mean that to follow Jesus we can’t go play a round of golf, or listen to our favorite music? Does it mean that we can’t enjoy watching a movie? I don’t think that is quite what Jesus had in mind.

I believe to deny ourselves has to be put in perspective. We have to deny ourselves of anything that hinders us from following Jesus, from doing His will in our lives, or that would cause us to sin. Notice what Paul wrote to Titus. He said that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to DENY ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age...”

(Titus 2:11-14) “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, {12} instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, {13} looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, {14} who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

So, we are to deny ungodliness in our lives. What in our lives does not reflect the image and character of God? Do we use ungodly language? We need to deny ourselves. Is the way we conduct business ungodly? We need to deny ourselves of greed. When we look intently at the mirror of God's word, do we see anything ungodly? We need to deny ungodliness. We are also to deny worldly desires. Worldly desires could be a life of leisure. Worldly desires may be to accumulate wealth. Worldly desires could be fleshly desires.

Paul countered the denial of ungodliness and worldly desires with taking hold of positive things. He said we are to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age. This is very consistent with laying off our old nature, and putting on the new self. We are to live transformed lives, and the denial of self is the first part of that equation.

When Jesus said we must deny ourselves, one of the biggest things that stands out is self. We must deny self, or selfishness. Selfishness is a big problem in families and relationships. The church in Philippi had some issues, and so Paul wrote that letter to help them come together in unity. Notice what he said in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Paul is telling them and us to deny ourselves and to think of others. With humility of mind, we must regard others as more important than ourselves. If we have denied ourselves, that becomes a little easier.

(Phil 2:3-4) "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; {4} do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

b. Take up your cross

The second requirement that Jesus tells this multitude is that to be His disciple, we must carry our own cross, and come after Him. Jesus has just told His disciples that He is going to suffer, be rejected, and be killed. Now, He is telling people that if they want to follow Him, they must be willing to take up their cross. The disciples and the crowd knew what the cross meant – death. It was not just any death, but it meant the most cruel and agonizing death possible. It is the most painful death ever invented by man. The Persians invented crucifixion about 300 BC, and the custom was adopted by the Romans and other groups. Crucifixion was reserved primarily for the most vicious of male criminals. The term crucifixion means "fixed to a cross," but it was so painful that the term "excruciating" was derived from crucifixion.

(Mark 8:34) "And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes that he has been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer him who lives, but Christ who lives in him. Paul identifies with the crucifixion of Christ. What does he mean by saying he has been crucified with Christ. We must be willing to put our flesh to death.

(Gal 2:20) "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Paul writes in Romans that those of us who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized in His death. In baptism, we are immersed in water, which represents being buried with Christ. We are raised up out of the water which represents being raised up with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. What is the purpose of this? Paul writes that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with. Paul's comment about being crucified with Christ is about crucifying his fleshly desires and sin.

(Rom 6:3-7) "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? {4} Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. {5} For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, {6} knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; {7} for he who has died is freed from sin."

This is confirmed in Galatians 5:24. Paul says that "those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

(Gal 5:24) "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

In Colossians 3:1-5, Paul speaks again about the death of our earthly members. He says that if we have been raised up with Christ, we are to seek the things above. For us to be raised up with Him, we must have also died with Him. In verse three he says, "for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God...therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

(Col 3:1-5) "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. {2} Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. {3} For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. {4} When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. {5} Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

c. Follow Jesus

The third requirement of coming after Jesus was to follow Him. This is not a passive requirement; this is a lifelong pursuit of Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is not saying a prayer and then living your own life. When someone confesses Jesus as Lord, they are putting Him in charge of their life. Their life is no longer about them, but about following Christ. There is a progression in these three commands. Someone must first be willing to deny themselves. Second, they must be willing to die to self. Then, they can follow Jesus. We can't follow Jesus if we are doing our own thing. We can't follow Jesus if we are living in the world. We have to die to the things of the world if we are going to follow Jesus. In the picture of baptism, we are buried with Christ before we are raised up to new life.

The Greek word for follow is *akoloutheo*, and the root word is *keleuthos*, which means road. Jesus is traveling down a road, and if we are going to follow Him, we must be willing to travel down the same path as Jesus.

In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. The Greek word for way is *hodos* (Strong's G3598), which means road, highway, or way. If we are going to come after Jesus, we must follow the way or the road. The early church became known as "the way." In Acts 9:2, Paul received letters to arrest and bring back to Jerusalem any belonging to the "Way." These were disciples who were following after Jesus. Fortunately, for those in Damascus, God revealed Himself to Paul on the way, and Paul became a follower himself. (Today, the Way is a cult that does not believe in the deity of Christ, but in the New Testament, it referred to followers of Jesus. They were on that narrow road that leads to life.

(John 14:6) "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

(Acts 9:2) "and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

(Acts 24:14) "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;"

2. **Four Considerations** (Mark 8:36-37)

After Jesus gave the three requirements of following after Him, He gave the crowd four things to think about or to consider. He gave them a life consideration, a value comparison, a shame consideration, and a timing consideration (coming of the kingdom).

a. **The Life Consideration** (Mark 8:35)

The first consideration is about life. Jesus said if you wish to save your life, you will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake and the gospel's will save it. I love that verse. There are many people in life that are trying to do their own thing and find their life. That is backwards. Jesus said that if you lay your life down for Him, you will find your life. If you want to find your life purpose, start losing your life for Jesus; you will find your life and purpose.

(Mark 8:35) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

How do you lose your life for Jesus? Find ways to serve Jesus. Look for opportunities to serve Christ. What needs to be done in your church? Volunteer to do it. When I went to Cobb Vineyard, I asked Thomas Cooley what needed to be done. He told me that they needed someone to head up the ushers and greeters, someone to start and lead the intercessory prayer, someone to start and lead a men's ministry, and for more Sunday School teachers. I took over the ushers and greeters and signed up people from the congregation. I made out schedules, and emailed people to remind them of their jobs. I put together ministry guidelines and oversaw the ministry. I

started up a men's group and led that every week. I started up a prayer group on another night, and led that. I volunteered to teach Sunday School, which was not my primary calling, but I was giving my life away. I also started and led a life group. All of this was on top of working a full-time job. Oh, and I also preached as needed on Sunday mornings. That is losing your life for Christ's sake. I promise you that you will find purpose and fulfillment when you lose your life for Christ.

When I came to Albuquerque, I went to Frank Malizzo, the pastor at Mountain Christian Church, and I asked him what needed to be done. He told me that they did not have a men's ministry. I told him they had one now. I asked, "what else needs to be done?" I knew they needed help with small groups and some other things. He told me that all he wanted me to do was start a men's ministry. So, I started a men's ministry, and before long we were running about forty men. That is how you lay your life down for Christ. Find out what needs to be done, and start losing your life; you will find it.

b. **The Value Comparison** (Mark 8:36-37)

The second consideration that Jesus gave was the value comparison. He asked, "for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The answer to Jesus' question is there is no profit in gaining the whole world and forfeiting your soul. The things of the earth are temporal, but our souls are eternal. You can't take the temporary things with you into eternity.

(Mark 8:36-37) "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? {37} For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

In *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, written by Randy Alcorn, he wrote that "You'll never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul."¹ You cannot take it with you. Things and possessions on earth are temporal, but our souls are eternal. When John D. Rockefeller died, and he was one of the wealthiest men in history, someone asked his accountant how much he left. I think it is a pretty nosy question, but this person wanted to know how much his net worth was. Nowadays, you can google peoples' wealth and find out, but this person asked his accountant. His answer was perfect, "He left it all."² We can't take it with us; it is temporal.

A few weeks ago, Mike Behm preached on the rich fool in Luke 12. This rich man built bigger barns to store his grain and goods. But God said to him, You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared? So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. If we are going to follow Christ, we must trade the riches of this world for eternal riches. We need to store up treasures in heaven. We should be rich towards God. We must "turn our eyes upon Jesus, and look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

(Luke 12:20-21) "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?' {21} "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

¹ Money, Possessions, and Eternity, by Randy Alcorn, page 57.

²² Money, Possessions, and Eternity, by Randy Alcorn, page 57.

c. The Shame Consideration (Mark 8:38)

The third consideration that Jesus gave the crowd to think about was about shame. He said that whoever was ashamed of Him and His words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

(Mark 8:35) “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

When we think about shame, we think about bad or foolish things we have done. As a youngster I did lots of foolish things that I regret. I threw some tomatoes at my neighbor’s house one day, and my friend, Paul, got in trouble over it. He never squealed on me, but that was a shameful, unprovoked thing I did. I shot a street light out one day with my BB-gun. That is a shameful and unlawful thing that I did. I look back on many things that I did, and I am sorry for them.

When we think about being ashamed of Jesus and His words, we are devaluing Jesus. Jesus is not someone to be ashamed of. His word, the word of God, is not something to be ashamed about. This week, the Pope allowed for same-sex marriages. Apparently, he values the cultural views over the word of God. We are not to be ashamed of God’s word, but we are to be pillars and the support of truth. We should not be ashamed to tell our family and friends about Jesus. We should not be ashamed to let the world know that we are followers of Christ.

Karen and I were at the Transfer Station on Saturday. The worker at the gate is a nice fellow. There was pickup truck parked by the entry station, and it had a Trump sticker on the door. I asked him if that was his truck, and he said yes. I asked him if he caught any grief over his sticker, and he said that he did. But, he said that he was not ashamed of it; he was proud to stand up for President Trump. In the midst of a very left-leaning state that hates Trump, this man was not ashamed to stand for Trump. Jesus said that in the midst of this adulterous and sinful generation, we are not to be ashamed of Christ.

d. The Timing Consideration (Coming of the Kingdom) (Mark 9:1)

The fourth consideration is about the timing of the coming of the kingdom. This is not something in the distant future, but it is coming in power in this generation, before some of you die.

(Mark 9:1) “And Jesus was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

In Mark, this verse is the start of a new chapter. The Greek manuscripts did not have chapters and verses. This was the work of Bible translators many years later. “Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro is often given credit for first dividing the Latin Vulgate into chapters in the real sense, but it is the arrangement of his contemporary and fellow cardinal Stephen Langton who in 1205 created the chapter divisions which are used today. They were then inserted into Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in the 16th century. Robert Estienne (Robert Stephanus) was the first to number the verses within each chapter, his verse numbers entering printed editions in

1551 (New Testament) and 1571 (Hebrew Bible).”³ In the parallel passage in Matthew, (Matthew 16:13-28) it is the last verse of that section and chapter. I have included Mark 9:1 because I believe it goes with our text today.

Jesus said that some that were there would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God after it has come with power. I believe that Jesus was speaking about Pentecost. It was there that the kingdom of God came and clothed the disciples with power. So, most of the people listening to Jesus say this were going to be there to observe the kingdom of God come in power. The point of this is that it was coming very soon. The gospel of the kingdom is not something in the distant; it is something that was getting ready to happen.

Why did Jesus tell them to consider this? Because this is the most important decision of our life. Are we going to follow Jesus or not? His kingdom is coming in the very near future, in their lifetime, and so this is not a decision to put off. This is something that they need to consider right now. There are costs of becoming a disciple of Jesus, but there are also some considerations, and the time element is an important consideration.

Conclusion and Applications

As we close this morning, have you truly counted the costs of following Jesus? Have you denied yourself and taken up your cross? Have you made a commitment to follow Jesus down whatever road He leads you? Some scholars believe the first two requirements are a one-time event and the third is a life-time pursuit. I believe that there is a point where we make a decision to follow Christ, but I believe that you and I must continually deny the flesh and deny the worldly things. I believe that we must continually carry our cross and die to selfish desires and the flesh. And I believe that we must continue to follow Jesus all the days of our lives. I believe these are things for all of us to do, even after we have received Christ.

This morning, there may be someone who has never counted the cost and never made a commitment. You realize that the world and its riches are temporal, and that you cannot take it with you. You realize that your life lacks purpose and that you want to find your purpose in life. You are at the place that you want to pick up your cross and lay your life down for Christ. If that is you this morning, I encourage you to pray with me.

“Father God, thank You for revealing to me that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He came to lay His life down for me. Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God, and that You were raised from the dead. I ask You to come into my life today. I confess You as my Lord and Savior today. I want to come after You and follow You down whatever road You lead me. I want to serve You and I ask You to use me and show me Your plans and purposes for my life. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

There may be others here this morning that have made that decision for Christ, but you do not believe that you are fulfilling His call and purpose in your life. Some of you may not know His purpose for your life. I want to encourage those of you in this group to pray with me.

³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and_verses_of_the_Bible#:~:text=They%20were%20then%20inserted%20into,and%201571%20\(Hebrew%20Bible\).](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapters_and_verses_of_the_Bible#:~:text=They%20were%20then%20inserted%20into,and%201571%20(Hebrew%20Bible).)

“Father God, I know that You have plans and purposes for me. Those plans are for welfare, not for calamity. I ask You to reveal Your plans to me. I am ready to lose my life for Your sake and for the sake of the gospel, and I ask You to help me find my real, life purpose as I do that. I want to fulfill the calling on my life. I want to bear much fruit and bring glory to you. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Introduction (Mark 8:34-9:1)

1. Three Requirements (Mark 8:34)

- a. Deny yourself (Titus 2:11-14, Phil 2:3-4)
- b. Take up your cross (Mark 8:34, Gal 2:20, Rom 6:3-7, Gal 5:24, Col 3:1-5)
- c. Follow Jesus (John 14:6, Acts 9:2, 24:14)

2. Four Considerations (Mark 8:36-37)

- a. The Life Consideration (Mark 8:35)
- b. The Value Comparison (Mark 8:36-37, Luke 12:20-21)
- c. The Shame Consideration (Mark 8:35)
- d. The Coming of the Kingdom (Mark 9:1, Matt 16:13-28, Mark 9:1)

Conclusion and Applications