

- The idea of sacrifice and commitment are themes all throughout Scripture.
- I hope you read Mark 8 this week because what we are seeing in Mark 8 fits perfectly with what we celebrate and remember today.
- In fact, you might say that the message of Jesus contained in Mark 8 is one of the key messages that he gave about what it looks like to be a Jesus follower.
- It is said that Charlemagne's tomb, when it was opened almost 200 years after his death, found his skeleton still sitting on a throne, with a bible in his lap, opened to Mark 8 with his finger on this verse.
- Not only is Mark 8 about the center of the book with regards to its length, this chapter is the where the entire book of Mark turns. It is the linchpin, the hinge point.
- There are three things that happen in quick succession that are all related.

### **EVENT #1 – Healing of a blind man**

*8:22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."*

- I never understood why this happened. Every other instance of Jesus healing someone was instantaneous. It did not matter if it was leprosy, blindness, lame people, deliverance from evil spirits, even raising the dead – when Jesus touched or commanded, it was done.
- Yet here we have a healing that was in two stages. It was gradual. Why?
- The next two events reveal the why.

### **EVENT #2 – Peter's Confession**

*If any passage is the central part of Mark's entire gospel, it is these 4 verses. 27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.*

- This is like the pinnacle of Peter's life as a disciple for those years.
- Peter gets it. He knows and recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah. He sees and declares for the first time that Jesus is more than a rabbi. He is more than a good teacher. He is not pointing to another. He IS the one that everyone and everything has been pointing to.
- The problem is this . . . he (and the other disciples) don't *really* get it.
- They think they see but they really don't. It is like they are seeing but their vision is still clouded. This is demonstrated in the third event recorded here by Mark.

### **EVENT #3 – Peter's rebuke**

*31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*

- The imperfect tense of the language here shows that Jesus taught this repeatedly. This was not fuzzy. He was clear.
- 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

- Do you catch it? The disciples were beginning to see. But it was still fuzzy. The plan of God and what he was doing was still not clear to them. Their eyes were still not opened to see clearly and plainly what God was doing through Jesus.
- The healing of the man provides such a picture of the disciples and how they were in the process of seeing, but how they still did not quite “see.”
- It was only after Jesus rose from the dead that their eyes were finally fully open to see clearly all that Jesus had been talking about.
- Why do you think Jesus paid Peter such a stinging rebuke? It seems that Peter was simply looking out for his friend, even if it was misguided.
- The reason is because the temptation that the devil offered Jesus in the wilderness at the start of his ministry was being offered again, this time through one of his closest friends.
- At the very beginning of his ministry, Satan offered Jesus power, a way to rule, to exercise his “Godness” in an effort to short circuit the bigger plan of God.
- When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane at the very end, his biggest temptation was to step away from the path God had provided and do things according to his own desires. That’s why he struggled with “your way not my way be done.”
- Jesus knew that he must die on the cross and Peter is telling him, “No you don’t. In fact, it’s unthinkable. You should do differently.”
- Peter was offering the very thing that Satan offered – to get Jesus to circumvent His mission – to bring his Kingdom without the necessity of suffering and going to the cross.
- I think this was Jesus #1 temptation – it was what Satan offered in the wilderness. It is what Satan offered in Gethsemane and it is what he offers here.
- And it is the #1 temptation offered to you and me every day. It is what derails more lives and compromises more effectiveness than anything else. **WE WILL BE TEMPTED TO FOLLOW JESUS ON OUR OWN TERMS.**
- We might think we would never say what Peter said, but I wonder how many times you or I have questioned God’s way of working and suggested to him another pattern, closer to our way of thinking? We cannot afford to criticize Peter.
- Jesus knew that the danger here was so significant that he was not content to just teach this to his disciples.

*34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

- Jesus lays out so clearly. **WE WILL BE TEMPTED TO FOLLOW JESUS ON OUR OWN TERMS.** Jesus tells them exactly how you defeat this temptation and the consequences if you don’t.

## **I. To follow Jesus is to have my decisions determined by his priorities.**

- The biggest problem that Jesus had with Peter was the motivation behind his comments. “*You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.*”
- Peter’s philosophy (and presumably othes) is one based on power and control.
- Jesus’ philosophy of life and death is in direct contrast with that.

*34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

- You must put aside your own priorities and desires and follow Jesus.  
*Soldiers in battle are never supposed to simply do what they think feels right in the moment. There are generals and leaders who see the entire flow of the battle. They have objectives that are large, far-reaching and important. They have a bigger plan and see a bigger picture. Soldiers rarely see more than just a piece of it. Soldiers do what they do because they trust they are part of something larger. They are contributing to it.*
- We often live like we follow Jesus as long as our objectives and desires align with his. But we reserve the right to have my desires and wants and priorities supersede his.
- We will never see the overall plan. We cannot grasp all that God is doing.
- If you are unwilling to put his priorities over yours, then you are **FOLLOWING JESUS ON YOUR OWN TERMS.**
- Just so he was clear, Jesus told them what this looked like.  
*34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

## **II. To follow Jesus is to actively submit my desires to him.**

- To deny yourself is refusing to follow any natural inclination, however innocent, that runs contrary to Christ's path for us.
- Anyone who wants to follow Him must be willing to do the same thing that he himself was doing.
- Jesus denied himself. He denied self-centeredness. He submitted his desires to God's.  
*Soldier follow orders. There is a bigger plan but that bigger plan is pointless if those that the general commands do not follow them. History is filled with examples of both. Some of the most heroic battles of the wars we read about it are those where men were told to accomplish an objective and they did whether they agreed with it or not. We hear almost as many stories of soldiers who decided they weren't with the program. They ran. They looked after their own interests first. Before others and before the bigger goal. And the results were disastrous.*
- To follow Jesus is to submit my desires to him.
- If you are unwilling to submit your desires and choose to do what you want rather than obey, then you are **FOLLOWING JESUS ON YOUR OWN TERMS.**

## **III. The choice to follow Jesus always comes with consequences.**

*35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

- We often don't want to follow Jesus this way because it is dangerous.
- A soldier can be totally prepared and trained and still lose their life by following orders.
- There are even times when generals will deliberately sacrifice the lives of soldiers because it accomplishes a much bigger objective.
- That soldier who gives themselves up might end up as a hero, but too often it is posthumously.
- The disciples missed a key point in what Jesus said. He spoke plainly about his suffering and death AND rising after three days. They seemed to not hear this part. They were just shocked that Jesus would even talk about suffering and dying.
- They missed the great truth that that was not the end game.
- Jesus is clear. Scarily clear!

- If you follow Jesus on your terms. If you live by your desires. If you let self set the agenda and decide your actions. If you do this and get everything you hope to get – your life will be a complete and total loss. With everything you ever hoped for that mattered, lost!
- BUT . . . if you follow Jesus by taking on Jesus' priorities and making decisions through this filter. If you put your own desires to death. If you live by following him, then you will gain everything. You might lose some things that you thought were important. For many in the world this morning, this includes everything up to and including their very lives.
- We get so much more than a medal of honor. We get more than a flag ceremony. We get more than a military flyover or a memorial service. We get EVERYTHING that Jesus promised. We get his favor. We get eternity. We get him. And you will find that this is better than all those things you might be still clutching and holding onto.
- **WE WILL BE TEMPTED TO FOLLOW JESUS ON OUR OWN** TERMS, but following Jesus is not something we add to our lives.
- It is not something we do on weekends.
- Jesus is not someone to fit into the tapestry that is your life.
- We don't follow him with what is leftover after we accomplish the urgencies of our day.
- It is not wearing t-shirts, bracelets or going to Christian concerts.
- It is not having a fish on the back of your car. It is not helping the poor or giving money when someone really needs it. It is not going to church or teaching Sunday School.
- It is so much better than that.
- There came a day a few weeks after the events recorded here where Jesus faithfully followed his commander-in-chief's plans and he died. Horribly. Tortured. Crucified. Buried.
- Then, just as he had said, three days later, he rose to life.
- Death could not hold him. The grave couldn't keep him.
- He met his disciples and in that moment, what had been fuzzy and indistinct, suddenly became crystal clear. Their eyes were opened. They got it. They realized what Jesus was saying.
- And these men and women who had followed Jesus understood what Jesus was asking of them.
- To follow him completely. To sell out to him. To follow his priorities. To put to death their own desires. And it cost them. Dearly. In this life. But they understood that the value of the next life and the value of Jesus FAR exceeded the value of anything this life had to offer.
- We get the same opportunity. The same choice.