

The Cost of Following Christ

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Mark 1:14-20

There is an incredible lie that has been infused into our religious culture. The unfortunate fact is that many people, even faithful churchgoers, have bought this lie hook, line, and sinker. The lie is this: Following Jesus doesn't cost much. You don't have to search far to find it. You can turn on the TV and see the folly of many ministries preaching a "sign on the dotted line" Christianity. This kind of message is palatable and goes down easy. Why? Because the gospel it contains, demands nothing of your life. If you will just sign-up for Jesus, life is easy, comfortable, and without sacrifice. Our culture has turned Christianity into a consumable to be used instead of a Christ to be believed and obeyed. All throughout the gospels, Jesus asked individuals to follow Him. But He was always asking them to count the cost involved in doing so. Listen to this quote by an anonymous author that I think accurately describes our culture today.

The Gospel of Christ has been replaced and its power has been removed from the churches around the globe. Where Jesus called his people to abandon this world, love God, and love one another, we now declare that one must simply pray a prayer or join a church. Where Jesus' message demanded the entirety of one's life, today's gospel demands nothing. Unfortunately, where Jesus' Gospel had the power to save us from sin and death, the gospel preached by many today is only a candy-coated trip to Hell.

As Jesus calls His first disciples in our text this morning, I want to look at what following Jesus means and costs. Discipleship was a call to follow Jesus at the expense of everything else. Friends, if following Jesus has never cost you anything, then it's not Jesus you're following. Let's turn our attention to our text for this morning. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. Mark 1:14-20

Brothers and sisters, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

I. FOLLOWING CHRIST MEANS BEING COMMITTED TO HIS MESSAGE (v.14-15)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Jesus is beginning His public ministry as John the Baptist is concluding his. John was put in prison and we'll learn later in chapter 6 that he wouldn't come out alive (cf. 6:17-29). Mark uses intentional language to describe John's incarceration. He writes, "Now after John was arrested..." The NASB translates it, "Now after John had been taken into custody..." Mark uses the Greek verb, *παράδωμι*, which means to be "given over," "handed over," or "delivered up". Mark uses this same verb in 3:19 when he writes that Judas "betrayed" Jesus. This suggests that Mark sees a parallel between John the forerunner and Jesus the Messiah's experiences. John was "handed over" to King Herod and beheaded (6:27). Jesus was "handed over" to Pilate and crucified (15:25). It's also noteworthy that Mark uses the passive voice of the verb, which implies that God's purpose was being fulfilled in John's arrest. There are two things I want you to note here. First, God is sovereign over all the circumstances of your life, even being imprisoned. Secondly, following Jesus is costly. If it was costly for the King it will certainly be costly for His subjects. We'll come back to the cost of following Christ here shortly.

Jesus had gone out of Nazareth of Galilee to be baptized and now he returns to the region to begin His public ministry. Mark wasn't concerned as much with the chronology of Jesus' life thus he leaves out about a year's worth of Jesus' ministry from His baptism to the beginning of His Galilean ministry. This period is often referred to as the "year of obscurity". There is no reason for concern here as John fills in the details (cf. John 1:43-4:3) telling us that Jesus spent time in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and in Judea before returning to Galilee a second time. This is where Mark picks up.

Notice that Jesus comes into Galilee "*proclaiming* the gospel of God". "Proclaiming" is the word *κηρύσσω*, and it means to "announce," "proclaim," or "herald". Mark used the same word of John the Baptist who "preached" that the One who came after him was greater than he. The same word is used of Jesus' disciples in Mark 3:14, "And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to *preach*." John the Baptist was a proclaimer, Jesus was a proclaimer, and Jesus' followers are, likewise, to be proclaimers! Who are you proclaiming the gospel to? Who is on your evangelistic radar?

What did Jesus proclaim? What was His message? Mark tells us that Jesus proclaimed the “gospel of God.” As our study of Mark began, we noted that gospel means “glad tidings,” or “good / joyful news”. What is that good news? It’s good news of truth, hope, peace, promise, and salvation. The good news is that the long-awaited “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” has arrived (cf. John 1:29). You might notice that Jesus is said to have proclaimed the gospel of “God” and not the gospel of “Christ”. Why is this? If you can remember back to our opening study, I mentioned that “Christ” was a title synonymous with “Messiah”. Because the Jews were looking for a military-political Messiah that would sweep in and save them from Roman oppression, Jesus often refrained from using this title of Himself in public discourse. Instead, as to not confuse His audience, Jesus proclaimed the gospel of “God”.

If following Jesus means being committed to His message, let’s take a moment and look at the content of Jesus’ message. Jesus makes **two declarations** and **two commands** in verse 15. Mark writes, “[Jesus came] saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

TWO DECLARATIONS

The first declaration is, “The time is fulfilled”. This means that God’s appointed time of preparation and expectation, the Old Testament era, now stands fulfilled. In Galatians 4:4 Paul writes, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” There is a sense of urgency in Jesus’ message.

The second declaration, “The kingdom of God is at hand,” presents a key feature of Jesus’ message – the kingdom. The word “Kingdom” (βασιλεία) means “dominion,” “reign,” or “royal rule.” Implicit in the word “kingdom” is the sovereign authority of a king, the activity of his ruling, and the realm of his rule. The “kingdom of God” is a dynamic (not static) reality that refers to God’s sovereign activity of ruling over His Creation. Jesus said God’s rule “is at hand,” or “near”. But it wasn’t near in the political form the Jews expected. Rather, it had arrived in the sense that Jesus, the Agent of God’s rule, was present among them. This was “the good news from God.” God is near!

TWO COMMANDS

Jesus’ two declarations flow right into two commands. The first command is *repent* (μετάνοια). The second command is *believe* (πιστεύω) *in the gospel*. This is the old sermon that every faithful witness of God has preached. From Noah to the present day, the message has always been the same – repent and believe. It’s important to note that repentance and faith (belief) are bound together. They are not successive (one following the other) acts. To “repent” is to turn

away from an existing object of trust (e.g., oneself). To “believe” is to commit oneself wholeheartedly to an object of faith. Thus, to believe in the gospel means to believe in Jesus Himself as the saving Son of God. He is the “content” of the gospel’s good news (cf. 1:1).

All of us are by nature born into sin and are thus children of wrath. We come from the womb guilty and condemned before God. Every person must individually repent, flee to the hope set before us in the gospel, and be born again (cf. John 3:3). This is the only way a person can enter into or receive (as a gift) the Kingdom of God. A person can enter into Heaven without an education, without many skills, without worldly greatness, without riches and wealth, and without physical health, but be unmistakably clear that no one will reach heaven without repentance and faith.

Let me say a brief word about repentance. There are two things that we must never confuse: they are sorrow for the consequences of sin and sorrow for sin. Plenty of people are desperately sorry for the mess that sin gets them into, but in their heart, if they had reasonable surety that they could escape the consequences, would engage in the same sin again. For this person, it isn’t the sin that is hated, it’s the consequences.¹ Friends, this person is not saved. Repentance means that a person has come, not to hate the consequences of their sin, but to hate the sin itself. A Christian hates the dishonor his sin brings upon his Savior more than the temporal consequences suffered as a result. When it comes to sin, the true Christian flees from it, fights against it, considers it his greatest plague, resents the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be completely delivered from it. May we never rest until we know repentance and faith by personal experience and can call them our own.

II. FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS BEING WHOLEHEARTEDLY COMMITTED TO HIM (v.16-17a)

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me...”

The words “Follow Me” are literally, “Come after Me”. This is a technical expression that means “Go behind Me as a disciple.” In Jesus’ day it was common for pupils to seek out a rabbi to follow, but that wasn’t the case with Jesus. He took the initiative and called His first disciples to follow Him. That meant to permanently leave what they were previously engaged in as a livelihood, and come with Him. The story unfolds with Jesus walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He sets his eyes on four fishermen that were casting their nets. First, Simon (Peter) and Andrew. Second, James and John.

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: John Know Press, 1975), 26

*Note - there are some major dangers in Barclay’s theology. Read him with vigilant discernment.

I wonder what it might look like if sometime we would just drop our nets. Could God use us so much more effectively? The question is: What are your nets? What are those things that you hold onto so tightly that you are unwilling to immediately drop to follow the Lord Jesus with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength? These men dropped all allegiances as fishermen to give all other allegiances to the King of fishermen. Jesus demands that we follow Him whatever the cost.

In Luke 9:57-62, a familiar passage to many of you, we see Jesus calling a different group of individuals to follow him. Luke writes, "As they (Jesus and His Disciples) were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'" He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good bye to my family.' Jesus replied, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'"

Jesus encounters three men here that think they are ready to follow him. The first man approaches Jesus and says, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replies, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." I think what Jesus is doing here is lovingly asking a question by using a statement – He's asking, "Are you sure?" In other words, "Following Me means giving up all the comforts and amenities that you enjoy. It means leaving your home and all of your possessions; it won't be easy. Are you sure?"

Jesus approaches the second man and says, "Follow me." And the third man emphatically states, "Jesus, I will follow you!" But immediately these men give Jesus a reason that something else is more important. One needed to bury his father and the other needed to tell his family goodbye. Their responses to Jesus revealed their treasure – family. The question that Jesus is asking here is: Who is first, Me, or your family? Jesus is trying to help these fellas see that their treasure is misplaced! Anything that keeps us from following Jesus immediately and without reservation is a misplaced treasure.

Jesus, in Matthew 13:44-46, tells us a parable to illustrate how we should respond to the treasure of Christ. He says, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

When a man comes across the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, he gives up all he has, turns his back on all of the world, and embraces Christ. The point that Jesus is trying to make here is that He is absolute and all other allegiances are relative. The question here is: Do you want Me above all? Do you want to follow Me more than anything? Then Jesus asserts how it is to work if these men

really want to follow Him. He says, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (cf. Luke 9:62). You can’t serve, exalt, magnify, or glorify Christ if you are always second-guessing the value of following Him. Looking back means longing back; it means we’re not really sure He is worth following. Jesus is looking for sold out, I’m all in no matter the cost, followers. It’s radical I know...But if you look at the sum total of all of Jesus’ teaching - it’s pretty radical! Following Christ means being whole-heartedly committed to Him.

III. FOLOWING JESUS MEANS BEING SOLD OUT TO HIS MISSION (v.17b)

...“and I will make you become fishers of men.”

Jesus didn’t call His disciples to follow him without purpose. He took four fisherman and called them to employ their skill in the lives of others. Literally, with nets in hand, Jesus tells these men, “I’m going to give you a new profession. From now on you won’t be fishing for fish with nets, you’ll fish for people with the gospel!” We quote this verse a lot, but I’m not convinced we understand the weight of what Jesus was asking of these fishermen. He was asking them to give up their way of income, their livelihood, to come and follow Him. There was no promise of economic security. But there was a promise of a more satisfactory vocation. Our text goes on to say that immediately they dropped their nets, left their boat and their father, and followed Jesus.

Jesus’ mission was to seek and save what was lost (cf. Luke 19:10). He never altered or became sidetracked from his mission. He has called us to the mission of seeking out the lost and proclaiming the good news of the gospel. Friends, apart from the gospel, the lost cannot be saved. I’m convinced this is one of the reasons Jesus didn’t send us to heaven the moment we stepped into the light. There is a gospel to proclaim to a lost and dying world. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” Matthew 28:18-20. That’s the mission that we have been called to. To teach the whole wide world what God has commanded.

Paul asks 4 rhetorical questions in Romans 10:14-15:

1. How will they call on him whom they have not believed?
2. And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?
3. And how are they to hear without someone preaching?
4. And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

The answer to all 4 questions is they can't and they won't (this isn't negating God's sovereignty). Paul goes on in verse 17 to tell us, "Faith comes by hearing, hearing the word of Christ."

Years ago, Dan Hayes wrote a book called *Fireseeds of Spiritual Awakening*. In the book, he challenged a generation of young people to be committed to making the gospel known in their spheres of influence. His words are a challenge to us all:

We believe that God is giving us, as students, a moment in history to shake powers and principalities, seen and unseen, for the kingdom of Heaven.

We believe that time has come for us, as students to reject the rampant pursuit of career and money and instead to pursue the urgent call of the eternal welfare of men and women worldwide.

We believe the time has come for us, as students, to consider the Great Commission of Jesus Christ as our personal and primary responsibility before God and to get on with the job of reaching and discipling the nations on earth before Christ's return.

Finally, we believe that Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat will not ask us what grades we made, what honors we won, what career positions we held, what our bank balance was, what fashions we chose, what denominations we belonged to, or the salary we earned. We do believe that He will ask us what we accomplished in this life for eternity and for the souls of men and women.

Therefore, we give ourselves wholeheartedly to Him to go where He tells us, to do what He commands and to say what He says, empowered by His Spirit as long as we shall live on earth.²

God uses people as His means of spreading the gospel and we have all been enlisted. Our ministries will all look a bit different, but there are no reserves. Following Christ means following Him on His mission. The mission of taking the gospel to the whole wide world and it starts wherever you are. It starts with the cashier at the checkout line. It starts with the stay at home mom next door. It starts with the man or woman that works in the cubical next to yours. It starts with the guy or the girl that sits next to you in class. It starts with the guy or the girl that shares a locker right next to you. It starts with the guy or the girl that lives on your dorm floor. God has just called you to be faithful where you are. Think about all of the people you rub shoulders with everyday. I think we miss so many opportunities because we aren't actively looking for them. Jesus told His disciples, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" John 4:35.

² Dan Hayes, *The Time Has Come*.

IV. FOLLOWING JESUS MEANS LOSING YOUR LIFE TO FIND NEW LIFE IN HIM (v.18-20)

And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

These first four disciples wasted no time following their Master. "Immediately," Mark says, "They left their nets and followed Jesus". The verb translated "left" means to "neglect" or "abandon". The tense of the Greek here illustrates permanence. Without hesitation they broke completely with their former occupation to follow Jesus. Steven Lawson says, "The demands of following Christ will cost you everything. But you gain far more than you give up. You give up dirt for diamonds." *When Jesus bids us "Come follow," He bids us to come and die. In His own words He said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"* Luke 9:23-25. Following Christ means following him to the cross because that is where He was going from day one.

We love the first part of Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection..." But we get a little restless at the grand finale of this same passage, "...and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." All of a sudden, the call to follow Jesus becomes a little more challenging. Following Jesus isn't easy. Jesus never hid the fact that following him wasn't going to be easy. He never shielded the fact that the cost would be great, so great, that some would be unwilling to follow Him.

In John 6, Jesus teaches that He is Bread of Life. He said, "He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." John goes on to write, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" John 6:66-69.

In other words, "We would be absolutely out of our minds to leave you. Jesus you are our most precious treasure, we will follow you whatever the cost." Paul realized after he had come to Christ that nothing else in all of creation was worth more than following Jesus, whatever the cost. He said, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" Philippians 3:7-8.

It will cost you money to follow Christ. It will cost you time to follow Christ. It will cost you sleep to follow Christ. It will cost you emptying yourself into the life of another to follow Christ. (Helping grow them to maturity). It will cost you having the newest and the best to follow Christ. It will cost you your reputation to follow Christ. It will sometimes cost your your desires and dreams to follow Christ. It will cost your safety to follow Christ. You know Jesus never said we would be safe. He did say, "I will be with you always..." (*Matthew 28:18-20*) and "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (*Hebrews 13:5*). But he never said we would be safe. It will cost you tears to follow Christ. It will cost you the best jobs and the highest pay to follow Christ. It will cost you everything to follow Christ. And Jesus lovingly asks, "Are you sure?"

Though it won't for all of us, following Christ could include the giving of your life for the sake of the gospel. Are you willing? We don't know what is going to happen to us the moment we walk out the doors of this church. We live in a world that is hostile toward Christ and hostile toward the gospel. I want to share a story with you as we bring this to a close this morning. The morning of April 20, 1999 changed the town of Littleton, Colorado forever. Rachel Scott and 12 of her classmates were on their way to school, as normal, completely unaware of the events that would unfold that day. Two Columbine High School seniors, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were planning a much different day. Well planned and heavily armed, the two boys intended to execute a school massacre.

Rachel was eating lunch with a friend on the front lawn in front of the school that afternoon. Investigations reported that the gunmen, after having shot her in the leg and through the back while she was eating lunch, asked Rachel if she still believed in God. Rachel replied, "You know I do." It was there that she was shot point-blank in the temple. Just three weeks earlier Rachel had shared Christ with the two boys. This is a horrific story. Unfortunately, it's a story that has been repeated many times since. But it is the story of a 17 year old young woman whose conviction to follow Jesus whatever the cost was unwavering. Even at the expense of her own life, hands firmly on the plow, Rachel refused to look back.

There is a noteworthy principle here: Christians can take risks because heaven is secure. It's the thing that David was always saying in the Psalms, "What can mortal man do to me? All you can do is take my life." Heaven is secure, therefore I won't live my Christian life in the closet, but I will live boldly for the Lord Jesus Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul said, "To die is gain" because it's to see your Maker face to face! When Rachel was confronted at gunpoint, she didn't take time out for a risk assessment. She had nailed that home years ago. She didn't have to think about her answer when a loaded gun barrel was pointed at her temple. The last words that Rachel heard were, "Do you still believe in God?" The very next words she heard were, "Well done thy good and faithful servant!"

Every day a Christian wakes up, there is a new battle that begins. It's the battle to put Christ front and center. It is the battle of turning from the momentary pleasures of this world to follow Christ and pursuing joy in Him. It is the battle of serving the needs of others before your own. It is the battle to understand that you are not the most important. He has already come, ascended into Heaven, and He's coming back... His name is Jesus. It may mean that your dreams and desires may have to be laid aside for the sake of the gospel. Jesus lovingly asks, "Are you sure?" The late Jim Elliot, who gave his life ministering to the Auca Indians in Ecuador penned these words in his journal, "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

CLOSING BENEDICTION

As we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning, hear this benediction from the Captain of our salvation, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" Luke 9:23-24. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!