

## Gain By Losing

Mark 8:34-38 – 9:1

March 1, 2026

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<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”  
<sup>9:1</sup> And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Who is a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Someone who is self-absorbed, self-willed, self-indulging, self-admiring, self-glorifying, self-serving or even self-pitying is far from being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A disciple of Jesus Christ is someone whose *first* love has radically changed from self to Christ. Therefore, someone who is primarily in love with self, in love with the world and the things of this world is not a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Today's passage is a very significant passage because Jesus lays out the requirements, the costs and the rewards for being his disciple.

Last week, we saw when Jesus announced, that he will need to *suffer*, be *rejected* and *killed*, Peter found it very difficult to process the path Jesus was going to take. Peter thought he could have Christ *without* the cross. Peter attempted to bypass the cross and wanted to get ahead of Jesus by rebuking Jesus. Peter said to Jesus “*This shall never happen to you*” Matthew 16:22. So Jesus rebukes Peter to get behind him.

Jesus calls Peter satan and a hindrance. Hindrance is the word scandal or stumbling block. Peter's thinking was a stumbling block to God's plan.

No response from Peter is recorded. Peter must have been stunned by Jesus' rebuke. And Jesus continues to teach about discipleship in our passage.

Verse 34.

<sup>34</sup> And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Jesus' statement begins and ends with the word *follow*. The English says “come after

me”. It is the same word *follow* before and after Jesus lays out his requirements for discipleship. If anyone wishes or desires to follow Jesus, *two* things are necessary, two essential requirements to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1. First requirement: Deny yourself.

What does Jesus mean? To deny yourself is to renounce the self. Quit the promotion of self as the central focus of one’s life and actions. Denying yourself is to shift your self-allegiance, your self-loyalty, your self-commitment or self-ambition to Jesus Christ as Lord. To deny yourself is not hold anything back to follow Jesus.

When Jesus says “deny yourself” he assumes you have found in Jesus a superior joy and satisfaction that is far better than anyone else or anything else in this world.

Hear what the Gospel of Luke records for us about Jesus’ requirement for discipleship. This is from Luke 14. Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup>“*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*” <sup>27</sup> *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.* <sup>28</sup> *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?* <sup>29</sup> *Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,* <sup>30</sup> *saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’* <sup>31</sup> *Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?* <sup>32</sup> *And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.* <sup>33</sup> *So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*

Remember when Jesus called James and John as his disciples? They were with their father Zebedee fishing. Not only did they leave their boats and nets to follow Jesus but their father too. When Levi or Matthew the tax collector followed Jesus, it cost him his employment. So, denying yourself to follow Jesus may include denying ties with family, employment and personal agenda for the superior affection in Jesus Christ. Now Jesus does not mean you abandon and neglect your responsibilities. Jesus is looking for wholehearted willingness and commitment.

2. Second requirement: Take up your cross. This is the *first* time Jesus mentions the cross in the Gospel of Mark. People in the first century immediately understood the what the cross meant. It was a symbol of suffering, shame, punishment, and death. Crucifixion was for someone who had been condemned. The Roman authorities used crucifixion for not only capital punishment but weaponized it to terrorize anyone who opposed them. Here is how people were crucified in Romans times. The main stake or wooden pole was generally placed at the place of execution, while the victim would be forced to carry the crossbeam. Once the condemned person arrived at the site, he would be fixed to the cross with ropes or with nails. A slow death resulted from a loss

of blood, and or exhaustion as the victim tried to lift himself to breathe. Crucified people sometimes would hang on the cross for days. In the first century people viewed crucifixion as the most humiliating of deaths; it was cruel, barbaric and appropriate for the worst crimes.

So, to take up your cross, therefore, means to accept weakness, humiliation, dishonor, contempt, suffering or even death. Taking up your cross is to blush and be ashamed for your sin and find healing at the cross of Jesus Christ.

These requirements for discipleship fly in the face of modern-day American individualism and comfort. Even Peter, a religious Jew, was getting comfortable with Jesus until this moment.

Is this requirement only for his first disciples or all disciples? Well, Jesus says, if *anyone* would follow me. So, there are no two classes of disciples - those who deny themselves and take up their cross and those who don't. And there are no other definitions for a disciple in the New Testament.

The Gospel of Luke says - And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me." Luke 9:23

In the following verses, Jesus gives his disciples *three* ground reasons for his call to discipleship.

First reason:

<sup>35</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

You see everything in this life ends with death. Death is the great unknown, the great enemy, the great interruption and the great insult to life. Everything you have done or have accomplished in his life to end in death seems very unfair. But that is the reality of our existence. So, to put stock on the things of this life and to end up losing it doesn't make a lot of sense. Jesus says the way to gain eternal life is to lose it. Jesus doesn't mean to literally destroy yourself but he means don't try to hold on to life too tightly. In the second part of his reason, Jesus says "*but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it*".

So, if you give yourself wholly to Jesus, if you spend yourself, if you exhaust your energies, your skills, your talents and resources you have for Jesus' sake and for the Gospel sake, you will save it.

Hear the words of Paul:

- "*I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls*" 2 Corinthians 12:15

- *“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” Acts 20:24*
- *“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” Philippians 3:7-8*

This life will be gone before you know it but what is done for Christ and his Gospel will remain and save you.

Jesus gives two more ground reasons:

Verses 36 and 37.

<sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what can a man give in return for his soul?

Jesus considers your soul to be very precious soul. The soul will live on after physical death. If a man or woman works towards making much of themselves and the world and eventually lose their own soul, it won't be much of profit.

Some of you may recall the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12. Jesus says a rich man had plenty of success and made his portfolio bigger and larger. And he told himself these words, *“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry”* Luke 12:19. And verse 20 says, *“Fool! This night your soul is required of you”*. Wealth will not help ransom your soul. Only Jesus Christ can ransom a sinner's soul.

In the concluding verse of this chapter and verse 1 of the next chapter, Jesus offers a choice to his disciples. Verses 38 and 9:1.

<sup>38</sup> *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

<sup>9:1</sup> And he said to them, *“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”*

Notice, this is Jesus teaching his disciples not unbelievers.

Whoever *is ashamed of Jesus* - meaning whoever does not embrace his suffering, crucifixion, his death on the cross and do not profess faith in Jesus, *and his words* – meaning the Gospel message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the gift of righteousness, and of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We live in a sinful and adulterous generation or age. There is no part of society that has been so infected by sin and evil as it is today. We need Jesus in every area of our lives.

So, what happens to those who are ashamed of Jesus and his message?

Jesus will be ashamed of them and deny them when he returns to judge the living and the dead.

But those who embrace Jesus and his Gospel, there will be glory!

Verse 1 of chapter 9 is a difficult verse to interpret. We'll pick this verse again next Sunday Lord willing. But in the immediate context you will see that Jesus takes three of disciples and gives them a glimpse of his glory.

The early disciples, not just the twelve, were known throughout where they lived and were unashamedly followers of Jesus. (Acts 17:6-7, 24:5, 28:22).

- Paul wrote to the church in Rome *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”* Romans 1:16
- Timothy was a little timid man. So, Paul encourages him in his second letter. *“God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”* 2 Timothy 1:8

APPLICATION: When you go around and live life in the world, does anyone in your neighborhood, in your family, in your friendships, in the store that you visit regularly, in the workplace *know* that your identity is in Christ because you are a disciple of Christ? When you are faced with an opportunity to testify to the grace of God, what would you say?

There is no middle or neutral ground as a disciple of Jesus Christ. You have a high calling as a disciple of Jesus. But your calling is a joyful calling. It is a rich calling. It is a blessed calling. It is also a sacrificial calling. To be called to be a disciple is a calling to deny yourself. It is also a calling to carry your cross. Either we proclaim Him or we don't.

To conclude this morning's message – Jesus says makes one thing unmistakably clear.

- Try to save your life by yourself and for yourself, you will lose it.
- Lose your life Jesus' sake and for the Gospel sake, you will gain it for eternity.

Do you wish to follow Jesus? Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him. You will save it into eternity.

## ----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Gain By Losing. Mark 8:34-38 – 9:1

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What are the *two* essential requirements to becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ?  
What are the costs and rewards in following Jesus?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
  - Do you believe that Jesus has called to live a life unashamed of him and his message? What are some implications – negative and positive to live as his disciple?
  - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HEART For personal reflection: What will you do to be a better disciple of Christ?  
What do you need lose in order to gain Christ more?