

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/4/2022
Mark 8:34-38 “The High Cost of Following Jesus”^{**1}
Series: “*Mark: The Servant in Action*”

Brad Brandt

Main Idea: According to Mark 8:34-38, it costs to be a disciple of Jesus. If we are considering being His disciple, we must come to grips with two costly matters.

- I. The costly invitation (34)
 - A. You must deny yourself.
 1. He’s not talking about giving up a few bad habits.
 2. He’s talking about a radical reorientation of your life.
 - B. You must die to yourself.
 1. Jesus lived to die.
 2. We must die if we want to live.
 - C. You must follow Him.
 1. It’s not “my life” any longer.
 2. I must go wherever He leads and do whatever He says.
 - II. The costly incentives (35-38)
 - A. What’s at stake is your salvation (35).
 1. If you live for yourself, you will lose your life.
 2. If you give your life to Jesus, you will save it.
 - B. What you must assess is the value of your soul (36-37).
 1. You will spend eternity somewhere.
 2. To gain the world and lose your soul is a bad investment.
 - C. What you are facing is an appointment with the Son (38).
 1. Jesus says He will treat us the way we have treated Him.
 2. Are you living this day in light of that day?
- Make It Personal: In light of the costliness of Jesus’ call...
1. We need grace.
 2. We need to respond.

As we take our Bibles and open them to the final paragraph in Mark 8, I must warn you. This is a weighty text. Jesus is speaking, and He is speaking about a topic that is often neglected in our day. It’s not a peripheral topic either. It’s at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. This morning Jesus is going to speak plainly to us about the high cost of following Him.

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:34-38

There’s a strange mentality circulating these days. It’s all around us. It’s the “You can have it all and it won’t cost you a thing” mentality.

We hear it in commercials. *Same taste, half the calories.*

We hear it in exercise equipment advertising, you know, the ones where you see the model with the athletic figure, and hear the promises, “Buy our product and you can look like this, too. And all it will take is five minutes a day four times a week.”

The credit card companies feed us the notion with a passion. By the way, I’m greatly concerned by this. Young people get married and want to enjoy the standard of living they saw their parents have, without realizing the work and sacrifice that made it possible. The easy solution is credit cards. *You can have it all and it won’t cost you a thing.*

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

Of course, it isn't true, but we hear it so much that we begin to believe it. Or at least we find ourselves *acting* like we believe it, this faulty notion that we can have it all and it won't cost a thing.

And to make matters worse, it's not just out there. Some bring that notion right into the church. "God is love," they say. "He wants you just as you are," they say. "Just believe in Jesus," they say, "and you'll have eternal life." But there's no talk about sin and its consequences, or repentance and its necessity, just a Christianized version of the very same mentality.

You can have it all and it won't cost you a thing.

Almost ninety years ago, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "cheap grace", in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, which is now a classic. Bonhoeffer goes to the Sermon on the Mount and talks about what he believes it means to follow Christ. It's worth noting that his book was first published in 1937, when the rise of the Nazi regime was underway in Germany. Here are some nuggets:²

"Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace."

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

"Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

"Every call of Jesus is a call to death."

These words about cost from Dietrich Bonhoeffer represented a cost he was willing to pay. His own life ended in martyrdom on April 9, 1945, when he was executed by the order of Adolph Hitler.

There is a cost, *a high cost*, to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. And no one made that any clearer than Jesus Himself.

² [The Cost of Discipleship Quotes by Dietrich Bonhoeffer \(goodreads.com\)](#)

According to Jesus' own words in Mark 8:34-38, if we are considering being His disciple, we must come to grips with two costly matters. First, Jesus presents the costly invitation (34). Then secondly, the costly incentives (35-38).

I. The costly invitation (34)

First, let me remind you of the context. As we saw last time, at the end of Mark 8, Mark shows us three characteristics that put Jesus in a category all by Himself. First, Jesus has power like none other. We saw that illustrated in Jesus' healing of the blind man in verses 22-26. Second, Jesus is a person like none other. Some people were saying He is a great man (27-28), but Peter said He is the God-man (29). Thirdly, we discovered that Jesus had a plan like none other. In verses 31-33, He predicted His suffering, His cross, and His resurrection.

Peter didn't understand the plan and opposed Jesus. But the Lord rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan," he told him. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." In short, Jesus made it clear that He lived to die.

At that very point, verse 34 says, Jesus called the crowd to Him. He had something He wanted every disciple and every would-be disciple to hear. He had just predicted His cross. Now He talks about *their* cross. He says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

As Wiersbe points out, "If there was a cross in *His* future, there would be one in *their* future as well."³ Suffering isn't only the divine purpose for Jesus, but the divine purpose for Jesus' followers as well.

This is the sovereign Lord speaking, my friend. As Jesus looks into the eyes of those in the crowd that day, He knows that some of them (just like today) were following Him only because of His miracles. There's something they needed to know. If you want to be a disciple, there is a price to pay.

How costly is this price? Jesus spells it out in His invitation. He says you must make three decisions (all inter-related) if you are considering becoming His disciple.

A. You must deny yourself. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself."

During World War II, when Winston Churchill took over leadership of England, he told his people in plain terms that he offered them "blood, toil, tears and sweat." Churchill didn't pull any punches. He said he could help his nation, that he would help his nation. But there would be a price and all would share in it.

Please note something. Jesus took steps so the *crowd* would hear this. So many ministries today take a different approach. Get the sinner in the church however you can. Offer him whatever his self-absorbed heart wants to get him into the building (give him music he likes, programs he wants for his kids, a nice latte doesn't hurt either). Then tell him about Jesus, but not everything, just the parts that appeal to his self-loving-heart. At this point, invite him to pray a prayer to "receive Jesus," and tell him he's now heading to heaven.

Then the next week, this brand new "believer" returns to church and you surprise him with, "Oh, by the way, it's going to cost you something to be a follower of Jesus." And then we wonder why he, and so many others like him, turn away from Christ in a short time. The truth is, they're not turning away from the true Christ, for they were never introduced to Him in the first place.

³ Wiersbe, p. 140.

In stark contrast, Jesus made it clear right up front, “If anyone would come after me.” Note the offer is to *anyone*. Whosoever will may come. My friend, you can come to Jesus this very day if you desire, and you should, for He alone can save your soul and give you eternal life. But if you come, you must indeed *come*.

What does *come* mean? It means a change must occur. To come means movement happens. What kind of movement. According to Jesus, it starts right here. First and foremost, you must deny yourself.

Please note He didn’t say to deny yourself *something*. He said to deny *yourself*. There’s a difference. What is it?

1. *He’s not talking about giving up a few bad habits.* Oh, that’s the fruit of it, but the root goes much deeper.

2. *He’s talking about a radical reorientation of your life.* To deny yourself is to say no to yourself (and as we’ll see momentarily, to say yes to Christ). To this point in your life, life has been all about you. What do you want? What do you think? What pleases you? Until now, life has been about *you*.

But to become Christ-follower, that must change. If you want to be Jesus’ disciple, you’re invited, yes, but you must renounce self.

Picture a wheel. In the middle is a hub. The wheel revolves around the hub. When we’re born, self is the hub. Life for each of us revolves around *self*. But if you want to become Jesus’ disciple, that must change. You must get a new hub, a new center for your life, a new orientation for how you approach life.

Again, compare Jesus’ invitation to the one so often preached in our day, which sounds like this... “Come to Jesus and He will give you what you need (and want): abundant life, a better marriage, fulfillment, peace, and more.” And then part two of the message, “Come to our church because we’ve got what you want: programs for your kids, a place to feel acceptance, and more.”

Granted, there’s some truth in all this. Jesus does offer us much, indeed what no one else can give, life that’s abundant and eternal. And the church has so much to offer a hurting sinner, and should offer it.

But the unspoken implication of this kind of preaching, and the listener hears it well, is this. *Jesus and the church exist FOR ME.* It’s all about *me*. I can have it all and it won’t cost a thing.

That’s not Jesus’ message. He says, decision number one, you must deny yourself.

B. You must die to yourself. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself *and take up his cross.*” Luke adds, “Let him take up his cross *daily* (Luke 9:23).”

As far as I can tell, this is the first time we see the word “cross” in Mark’s gospel, and it’s a text in which Jesus is talking not about His cross, but ours.

Cross-bearing isn’t simply putting up with some minor (or even major) inconvenience or irritation in your life. It’s not what the man thinks who says, after his car breaks down for the third time in a week, “Oh well, what can I expect with a Ford? Jesus said I would have to bear my cross.”

No, that’s not it. What was a cross in Jesus’ day? It was a horrid, execution device for criminals. When Jesus used this language, He had a picture in mind, and so did His hearers. To take up one’s cross is what a criminal did. This is the picture, of a man who has been condemned in a court of law, given the sentence of death by crucifixion, who is now required to carry his own cross-beam to the scene of his execution. He isn’t dead

yet, but he is as good as dead. And as he carries his death instrument through the city, he must endure the mocking scorn of the jeering crowd, until he arrives at the place where he will hang for hours, even days, until his last breath is literally sucked out of him.⁴

Friends, this is the invitation. To take up your cross means you are choosing to say goodbye to the life you have known to this point, and are choosing to be regarded as a despised criminal from this point forward. You are taking action that will result in your own death. And as we'll see, you're doing it voluntarily, and even joyfully, because the Person extending this invitation is worth it to you.

Please see the connection here. In verse 31 Jesus just predicted His own death, and now He invites us to join Him.

1. *Jesus lived to die.*

2. *We must die if we want to live.* By definition, a Christian is a person who is *like Christ*. Yes, that means he loves and does good deeds, just as Jesus loved and did good deeds. But it begins at this foundational level, with a willingness to die as He did, in obedience to the Father's will. He who took up His cross calls us to take up our cross.

We must be careful at this point. No, Jesus' cross and our cross aren't entirely the same. There's a redemptive aspect to Jesus' cross that puts His cross in a category all by itself. We are sinners and need atonement for our sin. He was sinless and did not need atonement, but instead *provided* atonement. For whom? For undeserving sinners. And where? On His cross.

Do you remember what Jesus said as He breathed His final breath? He cried out, "It is finished." Why those words? He was announcing that His atoning work was finished, totally complete. He had finished the work of rescuing the love gift of people His Father had given to Him.

The cross we bear contributes nothing to our atonement. Nothing a sinner does contributes to his atonement. Christ's cross alone does that. And God gives the merit of His Son's atoning sacrifice to any sinner who will simply receive His offer.

But something else occurred on His cross, something we do share. On the cross Jesus renounced self and obeyed His Father's will, to His very last breath. And that's the cross that we share with Him. When a redeemed sinner takes up his own cross (and only a redeemed sinner has the power to do such a self-denying action), he is choosing, as did His Savior, to obey the Father's will, no matter what the cost.

And there will be a cost. Obedience to the will of God always involves a cost. There will be outward trouble and inward conflict, as Jones put it.⁵

J. D. Jones helps us ponder the implications of this cross-bearing. He writes: "You have yours. I have mine. They differ from one another; but there is not one of us who does not know that there are things in us to be fought, and repudiated, and torn up by the roots, if we would follow Christ. Do not confine what I am saying to what we speak of as the grosser sins. We can see that the drunkard and the profligate have to say good-bye to their evil habits before they can follow Christ, and we know what agony that means in

⁴ "To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam of the cross out to the site of execution, generally past spectators, often a jeering mob. In rhetorically strong terms, Jesus describes what all true disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn and death, for they must follow to the cross." Keener, C. S. (2014). [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Second Edition, p. 149). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

⁵ J. D. Jones, p. 279.

many cases. But it is not to them alone this demand applies. It applies also to us. For there is not one of us who does not know perfectly well that in our hearts there are things to be repudiated and put away, if we want to follow Christ.”⁶

Look at your own heart. What’s there that must go if your heart is to become His throne? If you are not willing for that to go, you cannot follow Christ.

“Pastor Brad, are you saying I must get rid of my sin before I can follow Christ?”

No. But I am saying, what I believe Jesus is saying, that you must be *willing* to get rid of your sin. Jesus knows you are unable to stop sinning on your own, and He Himself will provide the power for the needed change. But you must be *willing to be changed*.

Jesus is using strong language. There is no punishment more painful than crucifixion. And this is the word-picture the Lord uses to depict what must happen to us when we come to Him.

This is the same word picture we see throughout the rest of the New Testament. This is the true Christian’s identity. In **Romans 6:6**, Paul writes, “For we know that *our old self was crucified* with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” Paul says in **Galatians 5:24**, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have *crucified the sinful nature* with its passions and desires.” And then he sums it up in **Galatians 6:14**, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the *world has been crucified to me*, and I to the world.”

So this is Jesus’ invitation. If you want to be His disciple you must deny self and you must *die to self*. From a human perspective you are losing yourself, but from God’s perspective you are finding yourself. Thirdly...

C. You must follow Him. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross *and follow me*.”

There’s a children’s game most of us have probably played at one time. It’s called “Follow the leader.” It’s an easy game to understand, not always quite so easy to play. The rule is simple: just do what the leader does, no more, no less. The difficulty depends on who the leader is and what the leader does.

That’s what we’re called to, beloved. *Follow the Leader*. We go where Jesus goes. And where did He go? “To heaven,” you say. “We follow Him and He takes us to heaven.” Absolutely, He is the way to heaven. But what route did He take to get to heaven? He went to the cross. First, the cross, then the crown.

“You must *follow Me*,” Jesus said. So, what does it mean to follow Jesus? It’s not complicated. It means two results occur. The first is an admission.

1. *It’s not “my life” any longer.* The choice to follow Him means that He is now my Master. That’s what the term “Lord” means. To receive Jesus as your Savior and *Lord* means you surrender your life to Him.

2. *I must go wherever He leads and do whatever He says.* That’s how follow the leader works. You go where He goes, and do what He does.

Friends, there can only be one Master, one person calling the shots. If you accept Jesus’ invitation, He will enter your life and give you forgiveness and salvation and eternal hope, no matter how great your sin has been.

But know this. He *will* enter your life, with the intent on changing it, and using it for His holy purposes. Are you willing? Can you say as did the hymnwriter, *Where He leads Me I will follow...?*

⁶ J. D. Jones, p. 279.

Paul stated his testimony clearly, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20).”

According to Peter, this is not optional, but our very calling. He says to believers in 1 Peter 2:21, “*To this you were called*, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

Think of it this way. When you know you’re going to die, it changes your perspective on what’s really important in the time you have remaining in this life. This is Jesus’ invitation, beloved. To be His we must deny ourselves, die to ourselves, and follow Him.

At this point you might be thinking, “Wow, what a costly invitation! Why in the world should I accept it?” That’s the very subject Jesus addresses next.

II. The costly incentives (35-38)

Let’s keep something in mind. Mark wrote this gospel, and he penned these words initially to minister to Christians living in Rome around the year AD 60. They were facing severe persecution, possibly martyrdom. Mark knew what they were thinking, what anybody who is facing execution would think.

“Is it worth it? Maybe I should renounce my allegiance to Christ and save my neck. *Is death for Christ worth it?*”

And to answer that question, Mark reminded his readers what Jesus Himself had said. After giving His costly invitation, Jesus presented three incentives.

A. What’s at stake is your salvation (35). “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

There are some things that, if you keep them, you lose them. In order to keep them you must *use* them. A talent is like that. If you use it, it will develop and become even better. If you bury it, you’ll lose it.

When it comes to your life, there are two options, according to Jesus.

1. *If you live for yourself, you will lose your life.* You can scratch and claw your way through life, grabbing all the goods you can get. And you may succeed in getting a lot of stuff. But then what? No matter how much stuff you get, in the end you will lose it all, including your life. R. Alan Cole says it well, “Life, like sand, trickles between our fingers whether we will or no, and to grasp it more tightly means only that it flows the faster from us.”⁷

On the other hand...

2. *If you give your life to Jesus, you will save it.* Only Mark includes the phrase “and for the gospel” (NIV). This makes it clear just how one loses one’s life for Christ. It’s by investing one’s life for the sake of the gospel, and specifically, for making the gospel known to the whole world.

As Cole observes, “The Christian therefore has not two goals, but one: Christ and His gospel are ultimately one.”⁸

The aspirations most people live with are, frankly, *too short sighted*. They have goals about their careers and personal lives and so forth. But it’s all about *this life*, what’s going to happen in the next forty or fifty years. Way too short sighted! says Jesus. He calls us to live with the next forty or fifty millennia, indeed, *eternity* in mind.

⁷ Cole, p. 207.

⁸ Cole, p. 207.

Who will give his life to Jesus, though it may cost him this life? This person will, the one who has eternity in mind. Why? For what he may lose in the next forty or fifty years is nothing compared to what he will gain for all of eternity.

So why accept Jesus' costly invitation? Here is your first incentive. What's at stake is your salvation. Here's the second. According to Jesus...

B. What you must assess is the value of your soul (36-37). "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?"

The question of the hour is this. *How much is your soul worth to you?* Friends, the facts are these, and they are non-negotiable. The first?

1. *You will spend eternity somewhere.* God created you in His image. He made you as a human being distinct from every other creature. He gave you a *soul*. That means you will not cease to exist when your physical heart stops pumping. When you die your soul will go somewhere, one of two places. If you have come to Jesus and put your total trust in Him, you will go to be with Him forever. If you haven't, you will spend eternity cut off from Him in torment.

It just makes sense, doesn't it? If you follow Jesus in this life, you will be with Him in the life to come. If you didn't want to follow Him in this life, why would you expect to be with Him in the life to come?

Now the second fact.

2. *To gain the world and lose your soul is a bad investment.* Jesus' question is worth repeating, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Think about your soul, my friend. You will spend eternity somewhere. Whether you live in this life five years or fifty-five years or one hundred and five years, this life will end. Then eternity begins. How much is your soul worth? It's certainly worth more than the short-lived pleasures this life has to offer.

Sadly, some people (many people) are selling their souls in pursuit of shallow, temporal pleasures. Perhaps you are. It's a bad investment, dear one.

What's at stake is your salvation. What you must assess is the value of your soul. Thirdly...

C. What you are facing is an appointment with the Son (38). "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."

There is incredible pressure in this world NOT to follow Christ. If you follow Christ the world calls you foolish, outdated, even dangerous! One of the things you will battle most is *shame*. If you listen to and give in to the world, if you give in to *shame*, you won't follow Christ.

But Jesus talks about something that makes the shame of the world pale in significance. It's another cause for shame.

1. *Jesus says He will treat us the way we have treated Him.* Hear His words again, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him..."

If you're ashamed of someone, you distance yourself from them. You don't want to be seen with them.

Jesus says that if we have done that to Him, if we didn't want it to be known that we believed in Him or identified with Him, He will do the same to us. He will treat us as we have treated Him.

When? The reference to "his Father's glory with the holy angels" refers to the event known as the final judgment. Paul mentions both in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."

He is coming again. He will see us and we will see Him. I don't want Him to be ashamed of me when I see Him. I can't imagine anything worse than to look into the eyes of the One who died on the cross as my sin-bearer...and see that He's ashamed of me.

Yes, He offers a costly invitation. But the incentives are costly, too, and this is the costliest of all. What we are facing is an appointment with the Son. So here is the question, indeed, THE question.

2. *Are you living this day in light of that day?* That day is coming. Jesus actually gives a foretaste of it in what He says in the very next verse, Mark 9:1, "And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'"

And six days later He took Peter, James, and John with Him up on a high mountain and let them see Him in His glorified state. He even permitted them to hear His Father's assessment, "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him (9:7)!"

And that's precisely what we must do. *Listen to Him.*

Make It Personal: In light of the costliness of Jesus' call...

1. *We need grace.* You say, "If we preach this kind of message, no one will respond!" Yes, they will. Why? Because God is a God of grace. God has chosen a people and He is at work preparing the hearts of those He has chosen. Jesus didn't die merely to make salvation possible, but to save the people the Father has given to Him (see John 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."). And the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of those people, granting repentance and faith to sinners.

No sinner will respond to the invitation Jesus extends, not left to himself. He needs grace. And grace, God's unmerited help, is available.

In order to deny self, we need grace. In order to take up our cross, we need grace. In order to follow Jesus, we need grace. And grace is available.

Therefore...

2. *We need to respond.* Respond to the Master's call. Hear His invitation, dear friend. Hear it well. And respond to day. *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Closing Song: #482 "Am I a Soldier of the Cross" (all four verses)

Baptism: Eddie Jenkins & Violet Edwards (Kaylee Haney also joining)