



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 8:31-38

Mark 8

"The Imperative of the Cross"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our passage is Mark 8:31-38, and if you were listening to Dr. Johnson this morning, he comes on at 7:30, so it's for ye who were spiritual. But if you were listening to him, you know that he was – and you'll recognize as we read through the passage that it's the same event, same passage, in Mark as he covered in Matthew, and as I got in the car, first thing I heard him say was there are two interpretations on this, and he was going to give the correct one but first he'd give the incorrect one, words to that effect, and so I held my breath to see if I had it right, and fortunately I passed. As Jerry Jones would say, we were on the same page. So if you're on page 66 of, at least my text, Mark chapter 8, follow along with me as I read beginning with verse 31:

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit

a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 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."

The Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we begin with words of praise. Thou art God, our Creator. You are the judge of mankind and yet by your grace, we can approach you with the word "Father."

Thank you for that because we recognize that you're our Father by virtue of what your Son has done on our behalf and we're reminded of that this morning as we study our passage and He informs His disciples of His death, the necessity of His death. And as we consider that necessity this morning, we pray that you'd open our hearts to the greatness of that sacrifice and why it was necessary, why it could be no other way if we were to have life eternally, if we were to enter into your kingdom.

And as we do so, give us a deep appreciation for the gift that we have in Christ of the life that we possess. There is this connection between the two parts of the passage, Father. First is the cross and then is the result of the cross. First is the salvation that was purchased and then is the life that we live as a result of having that salvation, and it's a life that is demanding but a life that has great ease when it's done and lived in light of what you've done, when it's lived with a sense of gratitude. We have much to be thankful for, Father, and we confess that we do not appreciate what you have done for us, what your Son has done in our place.

We confess that and we confess that our lives are not lived as they ought to be lived, with the devotion with which they ought to be lived. Help us to live in a way that's pleasing to you. Help us to live in a way that the world recognizes in us something that's profoundly different. And when the world rises up against us and rebukes us and

we are made to bear the reproach of the world, help us to bear it joyfully and willingly. What a small price to pay for all that we've received. We've received much spiritually. We've received much physically. You've blessed us with life, you've blessed us with provisions, and we thank you for that. We thank you for the privilege we have to intercede for those who at the present time are without and who are experiencing difficulty. We pray that you'd make provision for them.

Those who are without employment, we pray that you would provide that for them, provide the material sustenance they need. We pray that you'd give encouragement in the midst of difficult times and for those who are undergoing trials at work or at home, struggles with a spouse or with a colleague at the office, young people who are struggling with various problems at school, we pray that you bless them and encourage them and enable them to see your hand so that when they pass through the difficulty, they will be able to look back and recognize that you brought them through it safely and in all of that, we pray that you would conform them to the image of your Son.

Thank you that you use the hardships of life to do that, to make us like Jesus Christ, and so we pray that you would bless those who are in need to that end. Bless those who are sick, pray that you'd give healing if that be your Will. Certainly, Father, we pray that you'd give encouragement. We pray, Father, for the spiritual needs of the chapel. We pray for the various Sunday school classes and pray you'd bless the teachers. Thank you for their labors and we pray for the students, young and old, that they would learn and that they would profit from the time and effort that various men and women put into the lessons and pray that it would bear fruit.

We pray for the women's retreat that's coming up and pray that it will be safe, pray that there'll be no difficulties or incidents in travel. We pray that the teacher herself would be particularly blessed of you and that all who attend would grow and profit very much from what they learn. We pray, Father, not only for our church but we pray

for our nation. We are in difficult days with difficult decisions that must be made and we pray for the President, his cabinet, those who advise him. We ask that you would give wisdom to those men that they might make good decisions, wise decisions. We pray for the Congress, that it would govern wisely. Give them a sense of their inadequacy for the task. If it please you, cause them to look to you.

I pray now for ourselves as we spend this time together. We pray for a time of teaching, we pray that it would be profitable and that our eyes would be opened to the truth and that you would bring the proper understanding and proper conviction. And we pray for our hymn, that it would have a good effect in preparing our minds for what we are about to study. We commit this time to you. We thank you for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for all that we have in Him. It's in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] We are at the midpoint of Mark's gospel, and Peter has made his great confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ. It's a true confession, a profound confession, and now the question must be answered: What does it mean? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Christ? And what are the implications for us to have confessed Jesus as the Christ? When we become His disciples, does it make any difference as to how we live our lives? These are matters that the Lord addresses in this, one of the best known passages of Scripture and it's strong medicine for the spiritual indolent, for the spiritual indifferent. It's something of a wake-up call for sleeping churches.

Peter has said, "Thou art the Christ," and now in verse 31, the Lord defines what it means to be the Christ. But He doesn't use that term. Instead, He refers to Himself as the Son of man, verse 31, and he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. Now, someone might wonder if this expression "Son of man" doesn't lower the Lord's status from deity to humanity, from being the Son of God to being simply a man.

After all, if you trace this expression "Son of man" through the Old Testament, you find, for example, in the Psalms that it has the meaning of simply man, as in Psalm 8:4: "What is man that thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that thou dost care for him?" If you turn over to the book of Ezekiel, there you see the term very frequently used of Ezekiel himself. He was just a man, a prophet, but perhaps that's what the Lord is saying, "I am a prophet but just a man and nothing more."

That's an important consideration because this title, Son of man, is the Lord's favorite way of referring to Himself in the gospels, and so it calls for some comment. And to define it properly, we have to look at it in the principal passage in which it's found, the definitive passage, at least for this context, and that is Daniel 7:13-14, and I think it would be helpful for us to turn to that passage and look at it together, at least briefly, to get a sense of what it means when our Lord is using it.

One night while Daniel was lying on his bed, he had a dream in which he had visions, and in those visions, he saw a great sea, and out of the sea came four beasts. The first was a lion, the second was a bear, and then came a leopard, and the fourth was a somewhat indescribable beast, had iron teeth and horns, and all of these represent the various empires of ancient history that came out of the nations represented in the sea and the dominion that they had over the world for a time, each succeeding the other, the last looking at Rome and also Rome in the future, a revised empire.

And he was looking at these empires upon the earth and then he sees another scene, another vision in his dream, and this of thrones. And in the midst of the throne was a flaming throne upon which sat the ancient of days and before him, myriads and myriads of angels serving him. This is the true sovereign. This is the one who truly rules over the earth, the one who governs the existence, the beginning and the end of all of those empires that come and go.

And then we read in verse 13, "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and he came up to the ancient of days and he was presented before him. And to him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

Now, it's clear as you trace this title Son of man through the Old Testament that the overall sense of the term is that of humanity, speaks of a man, but it's very clear that the Son of man of Daniel chapter 7 is no ordinary man. He's a heavenly figure who at the end of time brings a kingdom to the earth. God gives to Him dominion, glory, and a kingdom which is everlasting and will not be destroyed. Now, that's what Daniel chapter 7 declares in light of or in terms of the Son of man. In verse 38 of our own passage, the Lord speaks of His coming, having referred to Himself as the Son of man, coming in His Father's glory with angels.

So it's a coming that's not yet occurred, it's a coming that's yet future, it's a coming in glory and power. He speaks of it later in chapter 13 verse 26: And then they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. All of that, the disciples understood. At least they understood the essence of it so that when He identified Himself as the Son of man, they knew that He was identifying Himself as the Messiah. They knew it was a Messianic title. Later, the chief priests, at the Lord's trial, when they hear that, they recognize He's claiming to be the Messiah, the person of Daniel chapter 7 who would bring a kingdom to the earth, deliver His people from oppression, and reign in power and glory.

As I said, the disciples understood that. What they didn't understand is that the heavenly man who received the kingdom from the ancient of days would first die, that he would bear the judgment of God as a substitute for sinful men. And so to make that clear to the disciples, the Lord explains that the Son of man must suffer, be

rejected, and killed. Now, notice the Lord doesn't say that this would happen as one might who was good at looking at circumstances and analyzing them as one who might have recognized an inevitable conclusion to the growing, increasing opposition to Him and concluded that, "If things continue as they are and I continue on the course that I am going, I'll most likely be put to death."

He doesn't say it would happen. What He says is it must happen. That word carries the sense of necessity, the sense that the cross of which He's referring was an imperative, it must occur. Question is why. Well, perhaps it's because the cross, the crucifixion of the Lord, was prophesied. If you study through the Old Testament, you see this quite frequently in direct prophecies of Scripture. For example, in Isaiah 52 and 53, which is perhaps the best known of such prophecies. But there are many others, Psalm 22, Psalm 118, Zachariah 13:7. It was pictured in the many sacrifices that were the heart, the central part of Israel's religion, the Passover lamb, the scapegoat and the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, the sacrifices in the morning and the evening. All of that looked forward to, either in type or in direct prophecy, to the Lord's crucifixion and being prophecy, it could not fail. It had to occur. Nothing could prevent the cross from happening. And so perhaps that's the reason that He says it must occur.

But why the prophecies? Why did the cross figure in the plan of God at all? I think that's what brings us to the real heart of the matter. He must suffer for the sins of men. He must die in their place if sinful men are to be saved. What did Isaiah say about the suffering servant in Isaiah 53? He said he was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And so all of the sin of His people was laid upon Him and He died because of that sin. And then, Isaiah goes on to state, as a result of the anguish of His soul – that is, as a result of the death that He would die – He – that is, the Father, or the Ancient of Days – will see it and be satisfied.

What Isaiah is describing is atonement. Christ satisfying divine justice by His sufferings and death in the place of sinners. At the cross, all of the demands of the broken law were met completely. The result is God is now satisfied and can forgive all who believe in Christ, and that's why the cross was necessary. God could not forgive sin, could not forgive the sinner, until sin had been paid for. Now, someone might ask, "But why is that? Why should our forgiveness depend upon Christ's death? Why doesn't God simply forgive the sinner?" After all, that's what we do. In fact, that's what we're commanded to do.

When someone offends us and seeks our forgiveness, we don't demand a sacrifice from them. Someone doesn't have to die in order to secure our forgiveness. Why then is Christ's death necessary for God's forgiveness? And I would imagine that many people consider those good questions. Many theologians have expressed the same concern. In fact, to many, it seems primitive. It seems beneath the character of God that He would demand a blood sacrifice for sin, for atonement. But there are two answers to that. The first was stated by Archbishop Anselm in the Middle Ages who wrote that anyone who imagines that God can simply forgive us as we forgive others has not yet considered the seriousness of sin or, more literally, what a weight sin is.

The second answer is such a person has not yet considered how great a person God is. God is holy, and while God is love, His love is a holy love, and as a holy God, he cannot overlook sin. For God to ignore sin is dishonest and it's a denial of his character. He must punish sin. And he could do it in one of two ways: by punishing the sinner or by punishing a substitute and He chose to punish a substitute, and the only substitute who was qualified to be the substitute was His only begotten Son because He is the Son of man. He is that heavenly man. He is the God-man who, by virtue of His deity, could offer a sacrifice as a man that was of infinite value.

And that sacrifice took place upon a cross because sin is that serious. The wages of sin is death, violent death, eternal death. The wages of sin is damnation, and that's the only payment that can be made to cover the debt of sin. And that's what sin is. Sin is a debt and because of it, we are in debt to God. God requires of us righteousness. "Be ye holy as I am holy," and that's not a relative holiness. That's not be as holy and as good and as pure as you can be. It's "be ye holy as I am holy," and God is completely and perfectly holy. That's what He demands of us. All we can give Him is sin, and so rather than meeting His standard, we fall far below that standard.

Sin is a debt and we are in debt to Him. And the person who asks, "Why can't God simply forgive sin?" might as well ask, "Why all this talk about a national debt?" It's a little bit scary. We've got a four-trillion-dollar debt and we're engaged in deficit spending. We hear about the fact that someday it's going to have to be paid off and if we don't do it, our children will do it or our grandchildren will do it, and the debt keeps building. Why don't we just deal with it right now? Why doesn't the federal government just forgive the debt, wipe it off the books, and then we'll move on from there? Why not? Because it wouldn't be honest.

The debt would still exist. Men would still be owed. Money has been borrowed and it must be paid back. To ignore that would be unjust. How much more so with the debt of sin? Well, then, what about managing the debt ourselves without the cross? Each of us taking it upon ourselves to make up the difference with our lives? We'll lead good lives, we'll be good citizens, honest citizens, faithful husbands, loving wives, all of that, good mothers. The person who thinks that he or she can manage that debt by himself, by herself, has not yet considered the seriousness of sin, has not yet considered the magnitude of the debt and his own inability to pay.

In monetary terms, all men are spiritually bankrupt. Broke. We're born into this world in debt over our heads. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

None of us measures up to God's standard of righteousness, which is perfection. We hopelessly fall short. We're hopelessly in debt. Now imagine, just to continue the illustration a bit, the common laborer trying to pay off the national debt with his own wages. Let's say he makes \$3.00, \$4.00 an hour. He'd have a hard time just putting food on his table and keeping himself out of debt. Trying to pay off a debt of four trillion dollars, not even considering the deficit, would be unthinkable. And yet spiritually, that's what men try to do who think that they can earn their salvation by their good works.

We have a mountain of debt, which, if it could be translated into monetary terms, would make the national debt look like an anthill. Our debt, the debt we owe to God, the spiritual debt in which we are in is infinite, and we are spiritually broke. We can't pay it and the payment is coming due. That's why the cross was an imperative, a necessity. If men were to be saved, Christ must die. We can't pay it, can't pay that debt ourselves, but God can because the death of Jesus Christ is of infinite value. It's sufficient for an infinite number of sins. And it not only secures forgiveness for all who believe in Him but also the infinite wealth of His righteousness as well.

Those who believe are forgiven of all sin, every sin, and are justified. They are declared to be as righteous as Christ is righteous. Only Christ could provide that. Only Christ could remove the infinite debt of sin. We can't do it. Only His payment for sin could satisfy God's justice and God's holiness. And so the Lord teaches his disciples that, teaches them that He must suffer many things and be killed, and those who will kill Him are the religious leaders, the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, those who we have seen opposing Him from chapter 1 on.

This is the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, the Pharisees and the Sadducees led by the priests, Caiaphas and Annas, and so it seems that His enemies will triumph over Him. They'll put Him to death. But it's a triumph in appearance only and it's very brief. Actually, it's no triumph for them at all. Christ is the one that triumphed at the

cross because there is another "must" in the passage, and that's the resurrection. As the Lord says, after three days, He will rise again. His death would be followed by vindication. And that's what the resurrection of Christ is, it's a vindication of Him. It was God's declaration that the one whom men had rejected was the Christ, the Son of the living God, just as Peter said He was.

They numbered Him among the transgressors. They nailed Him to a cross with criminals. They gave Him the death of a sinner, but He was no sinner. He is the perfect Son of God who became sin on our behalf but had never committed sin. He was the perfect sinless lamb of God, and through the resurrection, His Father demonstrates that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that He had accepted His Son's sacrifice, that atonement had been made, and that He was now satisfied. The open tomb is the divine endorsement of the cross. Without it, all preaching would be in vain, all hope would be lost.

There'd be no purpose in my standing in this pulpit or anyone standing in this pulpit because there'd be no hope. Had Christ not been raised, Paul could have written "the wages of sin is death" but he could have written no more than that. Only because God did raise His Son from the dead could the apostle finish the sentence, "but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The disciples needed to understand this before they made public proclamation that Jesus is the Christ. They were correct in what they had said Peter was, and I think he's reflecting the views of the other disciples, but there was much confusion on their part and certainly a great deal of confusion among the people of Israel.

So He needed to explain some things and to explain that yes, He is the king. And that king of Daniel 7, the king that is promised throughout Israel's history, the hope of Israel, and He will come as the king to establish his kingdom, but He is also the Savior. And before He sits in glory on David's throne, He must hang in shame on the cross. That's why, as Mark says in verse 32, the Lord was stating the matter plainly. He was making it all very clear to His disciples, and

Peter got the point. Knew exactly what the Lord was saying. He understood it but he couldn't accept it.

In spite of such passages as Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, all of the sacrifices that Peter had seen throughout his life, he could not conceive of Christ dying like those lambs. Could only think of Him in terms of a powerful king ruling over Israel and shepherding the nations with a rod of iron. And so amazingly, Peter took Jesus aside to give him some advice. The one whom just moments earlier he had confessed to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, he is now rebuking. Rebuking the Son of God. What makes that particularly amazing – it's amazing in and of itself, but what's particularly amazing about it is this word "rebuke" that's used is the word that's used elsewhere of the Lord silencing the demons. And so in effect, Peter was telling the Lord to be silent.

Matthew records the words that he uses. He says, "God forbid it, Lord. This shall never happen to you." In other words, "You're the king. You're the one that we have all of our hope in. You're the Messiah. You're that Son of man of Daniel chapter 7. You're not going to die. Let's not hear any more talk about death and suffering." He just could not conceive of Christ suffering. Now, to many, the very idea that suffering could be God's Will is inconceivable. A few of us really like the thought and so we might be inclined to be somewhat sympathetic with Peter's actions here. After all, he's speaking as a friend. He had the Lord's best interests in mind, didn't he? His motives were good.

But the Lord heard a familiar voice in those words that wasn't Peter's voice, one that He had heard earlier when he was in the desert, when the devil came to Him and tempted Him with an offer of the kingdom without the cross. You remember the scene in Matthew chapter 4, the Lord was taken by the devil to a high mountain and there showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory, he said to our Lord, "I'll give them all to you if you'll fall down and worship me." He was offering Him the kingdom without the cross,

glory without humiliation, victory without suffering, and that's what Peter wanted.

But if Peter had gotten his desire, if the Lord had followed his advice, Peter would have cut himself off from the very kingdom he was looking forward to. Because if the kingdom of Christ was to be the kingdom promised in Daniel chapter 7, the kingdom of God, a holy and righteous kingdom, then he had to redeem and cleanse the people who would inherit that kingdom. No one can enter into that kingdom who has not been washed of his or her sins, who has not been sanctified, who has not been justified. That's what Christ came to do. He came to establish a holy kingdom, and Peter was unwittingly encouraging Christ to destroy all hope for himself and all hope for his people.

But the Lord recognized the real source behind the words, and He unmasked him in a rebuke of His own. Turning so that all the disciples could hear him – in fact, there's a sense in which He turns immediately so that He's facing the disciples and they hear what He has to say, He said, "Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on God's interests but man's." Satan knew that his ruin would be at the cross. God had declared it all the way back in Genesis 3:15, so from the beginning of human history, Satan has known that and with his mind, which is a great mind, he must have set to work as to when this would happen, and when our Lord entered human history, he knew that the time was coming when that battle would take place.

And so he sought to turn Him away from the cross, the place where he would be defeated. He sought to do that in the desert and here, he sought to do it with Peter. Men also take great offense at the cross. It was the undoing of Satan and men see it the same way, and that's why men today deny the necessity of the cross and in so doing, they seek to elevate themselves. They seek to elevate that which the cross really undermines, which is human merit. Robs men of the very thing that they take pride in, and that's why men dislike the cross. That's why men deny it, because it robs them of all that they could

take pride in, it robs them of merit, it casts men at the mercy of God, and that's why the Lord describes Peter's words here as reflecting the interests of men, interests of prideful men. The interests of the natural man, not the interests of God. Words spoken by Peter reflect his pride, but they were inspired by Satan.

And we can always recognize the voice of the devil in the words that deny the cross. In fact, if you want to find the devil, the first place to look for him is in the pulpit. Look for him where the men are who are denying the blood of Christ and the necessity of the atonement and who are instead affirming human merit and the value of human works and just the value of man, the impossibility of a God of wrath, elevating a sense of a God of love who does not pour out His judgment on sinners. I think it's worth noting also the way in which this temptation came: disguised in a friend with encouragement. That's how Satan works. That's why he's so clever.

That's what the apostles speak of when they talk about the wiles of the devil. He approached Eve that way in the garden, you'll remember. It came disguised as a serpent with good advice. He was just seeking her best interests. After all, if she'd take that fruit and she'd eat it, her eyes would be opened, God was trying to hold something back from her. He was just looking out for her interests, and so he approaches her that way, and then through Eve, he gets to Adam. The only way to counter the subtle temptations of the devil, which are attempts to turn men from the truth of God and turn men from the Will of God, is the way that the Lord dealt with Satan in the desert. He dealt with him with the Word of God.

Every temptation, all three of them, were met by a quotation of Scripture, an accurate quotation by the Lord. Peter had rejected the Word of God in rejecting Christ's revelation about the cross, and in rejecting the Word of God, he'd opened himself up to the influence of Satan. So we have to know the Word of God if we're to counter the work of the devil, and the essence of the Word of God is the gospel, and the essence of the gospel is the cross. And so to confess Jesus as

the Christ is to recognize the necessity of His cross, the necessity of His sacrificial death in the place of sinners. That's what it means to be the Christ. Essentially, it means to be a suffering servant.

The cross was a divine imperative. Not only for Jesus but for all who would follow Him. We all have our own cross which we must carry, and in the remaining verses, the Lord explains what it means to confess Him as the Christ, what it means to come after Him as a disciple. It means a life of dedication involving three actions. He says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The first act is denying self. Now, that doesn't mean denying ourselves something or denying ourselves things or renouncing certain sins. All of that may figure into it, but it's far more basic than that. It means denying self, renouncing self. The basic idea of the word "deny" is to say no. So we are to say no to self.

We are to stop making self the object of our life, the object of our affections and our actions. One of the greatest impediments of the Christian life is self-interest, protecting self, looking out for number one. Paul takes up this problem in Philippians chapter 2 and uses Christ as our great example. He writes, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit," and then in verse 5, he says, "Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus who, though He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

What he's saying there is the only man of history who had the right to put Himself ahead of everyone else laid that right aside and became a man and put our interests ahead of His own, put the interests of sinners ahead of the sinless one. Now, that had particular application to the Philippian church because they had a little feud going on among two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had served

together in the ministry. They had been very useful to Paul in the furthering of the gospel but something had happened. We're not told what it was but one had become offended by the other, there was jealousy for some reason, and so they were out of harmony with one another and they were out of harmony with the Lord, and so Paul was urging the church to help them.

But what he's saying applies to all of us. We're to live that kind of life, a self-effacing kind of life, a life of self-denial, because pride, self-love, self-interest frustrates the Christian life, destroys the Christian life. Samuel Rutherford, the 17th century Scottish divine, wrote in one of his famous letters, "Oh, that I were free of that idol which they call myself." Renouncing self-centeredness is fundamental to the Christian life and it is a constant battle. Second, the person who follows Christ is to take up his cross. We often speak of burying our cross or of a person having a heavy cross to bear, meaning he or she has to live with some great hardship. But that's not what this is referring to.

This isn't referring to some irritation in life, some disappointment, or some disease. This is suffering the reproach of Christ, bearing the ostracism of the world, bearing the persecution that comes from being identified with Jesus Christ and His cross. And I think it intensifies the idea of that first act, denying oneself, and here, bearing one's cross. The image of carrying one's cross was probably a very common one during the days of Roman occupation. The disciples had all no doubt seen a man take up his cross and go off with a band of Roman soldiers outside the village and there be crucified. They all knew that he was on a one-way journey, that he wouldn't be coming back, and when we take up our cross, we don't turn back from that.

The difference between those who were crucified and the disciples is that we take up our cross voluntarily. We are to willingly accept the pain and the shame of being a Christian and willingly accept it to the point of death. And many in Rome to whom Mark was writing this gospel would face that. Philip Schaff, in his *History of*

the Christian Church, described the persecution under Nero as a carnival of blood. It lasted several weeks. Some were crucified, some were sewed up in skins and exposed to wild dogs in the arena, others were covered with pitch, nailed to posts, and lighted to burn as human torches in Nero's garden while Nero, Schaff writes, in fantastical dress figured in a horserace and displayed his art as a charioteer. So they became the object of sport.

For many Christians, life has ended in martyrdom, not only in the 1st century but down through the centuries. In this country, we don't face that kind of hostility. We don't face persecution in terms of violence, at least we haven't to date. It may change in the future. But we have to endure rejection, we have to endure ridicule, which is very unpleasant, very difficult, but we are to accept that. And not just accept it in a sort of stoical manner but willingly accept it, accept it joyfully as a privilege like the disciples did in the early chapters of Acts, counting it a privilege to suffer for the Lord. And to do so in such a way that we're willing even to face death itself.

I don't say that lightly. That's a very easy thing to say and even get rather bombastic on the subject and talk with great confidence. I don't say it because I take it lightly; I say it because this is what the Lord is teaching us. This is what He's saying, to take up our cross and be willing to even die for Him.

Well, thirdly, we're to follow Him. That is we're to continually be imitating Christ, following His example. This is what it means to come after Christ, to be His disciples, to be a Christian. How much of this a person will understand when he or she becomes a Christian, how dedicated he will be at the moment of faith, how determined his will will be to undertake all of this, will vary from person to person. This describes a life of obedience, the life of a disciple, and we need to remember that there is a distinction between faith and obedience, between faith and works. We are saved by faith alone, not by obedience. But in believing in Christ, in laying hold of the cross by faith, a person adopts a whole new life.

The two, however, can be confused, and I think that has happened with what is called Lordship Salvation. It broadens the definition of faith to where obedience becomes an aspect of faith. Faith can be defined simply in three terms: Knowledge, assent, and trust. Knowledge, meaning we understand the gospel, we understand that we are sinners, we're all born sinners. We deserve the wrath of God but in His grace, He has sent His Son to be the substitute in judgment for all who will believe in Him and in believing – not by works but by simply believing in what He has done, trusting in Him, we have eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. Well, that's knowledge. It's understanding that. Assent is being convinced that it's true and then trust is entrusting our soul to Christ's care.

That's not obedience, and to make obedience an aspect of faith blurs the distinction between justification and sanctification, between being declared righteous and being made righteous, between being forgiven of sin and overcoming sin. We're not saved by what we do, we're saved by what Christ has done, and faith simply trusts in that, rests in that. Does not encompass obedience, nor is faith the determination of the will to obey the truth. Faith and obedience are distinct from one another, but I want to underline this in your thinking, they are in harmony with one another. They are inseparably linked.

Trusting in Christ by faith alone will inevitably lead to a new willingness to obey the truth, due to the work of grace within us, due to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I think a mistake is made in mixing the two, but I think it's equally a mistake to separate them as though there's no connection between them, as though a person can have Christ as Savior and not as Lord. Obedience to Christ is not an option. Christ's lordship is not an option. Obedience is inevitable for all who share the life of Christ and for all who believe, He is Lord and He'll have His way in our lives.

When we believe in Christ as Savior, we at that moment adopt a life of dedication and sacrifice, of denial, of cross-bearing, which can

only be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. And that's what we are to be determined to do. That's what we're to set our hearts upon. It's not an option. It's what we are to desire and that's what the Lord was telling his disciples, if they're going to be His disciples, this is what a disciple's life is like. It's a life that brings hard but clear choices, choices of life and death. Verse 35: For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. Satan says skin for skin. Yes, all that a man has, he will give for his life.

Jesus says a man saves his life by losing it. Man's natural instinct is to preserve his life. There's nothing more dreadful to man than death. And his ambition to one degree or another is to obtain the world's pleasures and the world's power and prestige, so men try to hold on to life and also to grab the things of this world, but the Lord is saying there's something far greater than physical life, far greater than the things of this world, and that's spiritual life, eternal life, and the things in the world to come. And to have that, a person must let go of this life. It's a sacrifice of the temporal for the eternal.

I'm sure this verse was on the minds of many Christians as they were marched to the arena to face the lions and no doubt it encouraged them greatly and strengthened them in their resolve, as it should strengthen us in our resolve and be an encouragement to us when we face temptations at work or at school to be silent about our faith, to turn away from that faith, to exchange it for peace with colleagues or acceptance by our peers. There's real pressure that's put on us, put on us to conform to the world and to deny Christ, but the logic of faith and the logic of persevering in the faith, of sacrificing one's life for Christ, is emphasized in the two rhetorical questions of verses 36 and 37.

Young people, listen to this because I think to read this, you'd say, "No, that cannot be," and yet it is true, what He has to say. " For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" If a man could

strike a deal with the devil like the one Faust struck with him in the legend, who exchanged his soul for knowledge and power and pleasure, it would be a bad deal. What would he have? Think he'd have – oh, a lot. Wonderful things. Think, "If I had the whole world for my own and I could have everything in it" – well, what would you have? Would you have peace? Not really.

Oh, in a way you'd have peace but not genuine peace. Would you have lasting satisfaction? No, there's nothing about the world that can satisfy. It gets old quick. You might have security for a while but not for long because in the end, death comes for us all. All of the world and its wealth cannot compare to eternal life. And once a man forfeits his soul, forfeits eternal life by denying Christ, by rejecting the gospel, there's no getting it back. Even the whole world, if he had it, couldn't buy back his soul. For what shall a man give in exchange for a soul? The world and all of its wealth, all of its sacrifices, all that cannot obtain a man's soul for him.

The point is: Participation in this life doesn't compare with participation in the next, and it's the fool who tries to secure his own life at the expense of his eternal soul. In the end, he loses everything. Final support for devotion to Christ, for living the disciple's life, is given in verse 38. There is a day of reckoning coming. "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." The day of judgment is coming and those who are ashamed of Him, who reject Christ and His life of sacrifice and cross-bearing, will be rejected by Him eternally. Those who trust in Christ, who become his disciples, will be rewarded eternally and share in His glory.

This passage is a great challenge to the church at the end of the 20th century. To a sleeping church, and indifferent church, a church that's not accustomed to sacrifice, it serves as something of a wake-up call. Those who are truly His will live for Him. Are you doing that? They will deny themselves, their goals, their interests, for His goals

and His interests. Are your goals His interests? They will take up their cross, they will suffer the reproach of the world, they will follow Christ and not the way of the world, not the way of the flesh. Now, left to ourselves, that's an impossible task. But we're not left to ourselves; we have the Spirit of God within us and He bears fruit within our lives.

That is what we are to aspire to and that is what we are to desire, and we will do that, God willing, and that's what we should seek. So we should pray that God would give us the desire for those things and the diligence to live in that way. But if you're here this morning and you have not believed in Christ, let me warn you: The day of judgment is coming. He says it right here in verse 38. We find it throughout the Scriptures. The day of the Lord will come and it will come and when it does, we will all stand before Him. In that day, will He be ashamed of you? Or will He receive you into His kingdom?

The way of escape is in Christ and the way of escape in Christ is in His cross because that's where the payment of sin was made. All men are born sinful. All men are born guilty of sin. That's what Paul says. All have sinned, fallen short of the glory of God. We have an infinite debt that we cannot pay ourselves. By it, we fall infinitely short of God's righteousness, so we have two options: Either we can pay the debt ourselves and spend eternity paying for it in perdition, in eternal death – not annihilation, it's a way of describing eternal torment. We can pay for that eternal debt eternally in perdition or we can receive the free gift of Christ's payment in His death, his penal substitutionary atonement, which satisfies the righteousness of God.

All one must do is receive it by faith and by faith alone and by trusting in Christ, the one who suffered and died in our place. But you should know this: His cross opens up a way to dedication, not indifference. It calls men to a life of sacrifice and service as well as forgiveness and glory. In laying hold of the cross of Christ, we take up our own cross, that we can never lay down, and it is a heavy cross,

one that we cannot bear with our own strength. But, as I said, we're not left to our own strength. It's a cross that God enables us to carry every day, to bear by His help, by His strength, and for which He rewards us greatly. And it's that that should put all things in perspective.

What we have in Christ and what we can have in the world, they do not compare with one another. May God help you to consider that. If you've never – if you've not come to know Christ in a personal way, if you've not believed in Him, to consider what you have in this world, which at best is temporary, and what you have in Christ, which is eternal. May God help you to do that. May God help you to trust in Him, whom to know is life eternal. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious Heavenly Father, we consider the passage before us with solemnity because it reminds us of the great price that your Son paid. It was a great price because it had to be, as the debt of sin is so great. We acknowledge that we are sinful men and women, and apart from your grace, we have nothing, we deserve nothing but your wrath, and yet you in your grace, not because of any merit in us – we have no righteousness, no goodness that could offset the debt of sin – when we were enemies, Christ died for us.

Thank you for that. We remember that with gratitude, but we confess we don't have enough gratitude. Help us to comprehend it more fully and with the comprehension to live lives of grateful service to you. Thank you that you sent your Son. We thank you that we have a great future. And though in the present we bear a cross and we must suffer the reproaches of men, that is really a privilege. Help us to see it as that and to undertake that with joy and willingness. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.