

#58  
February 3, 2019

Mark 8:27-38  
Good news: Losing is gaining

<sup>27</sup> Jesus and his disciples went into the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

<sup>28</sup> They told him, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets.”

<sup>29</sup> He asked them, “And what about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” <sup>30</sup> Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.” <sup>32</sup> He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. <sup>33</sup> Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

<sup>34</sup> After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup> All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them. <sup>36</sup> Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? <sup>37</sup> What will people give in exchange for their lives? <sup>38</sup> Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this unfaithful and sinful generation, the Human One<sup>[b]</sup> will be ashamed of that person when he comes in the Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

In Mark chapter 7 Jesus healed the daughter of the Syrophenician woman. Chapter 8 begins with Jesus feeding the 4,000 along with a lesson about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. A blind man was brought to Jesus. Jesus spit in his eyes. The man could only see people walking around like trees. Jesus touched his eyes and the man began to “see everything clearly”. Paul would later write to the Corinthians, in what we know as the “Love Chapter”, that now we see through a glass darkly but there is coming a day when we will know and understand all things.

Today’s Scripture lesson is the last part of Chapter 8 in the very middle of Mark’s Gospel. Of course, the resurrection is the highest point in the Mark’s gospel. I would suggest that this passage and the beginning of the Mark 9 – the Transfiguration – are two more of the highest points. Mark is guiding and leading us up to this point.

So what is so important about Mark 8? Today Jesus and his disciples walk in to the villages near Philippi Caesarea.



It used to be called a good Jewish name: the region of Naphtali near the city of Dan. But then Caesar and his armies conquered it and renamed it.

The city and its architecture all serve as devotion to Pan, the Greek god of the forest. It was a violent city where human sacrifices were constantly being made. In the side of the mountain there is a large cave. During rituals the Greeks would offer sacrifices to the gods by dropping human sacrifices into a hole higher up the mountain.

Against this backdrop Jesus chooses to ask 3 questions:

1. "Who DO PEOPLE SAY I THAT I AM?"

It is not that difficult to answer. The disciples replied: "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets." How could he be John the Baptist. Everyone knew his head was chopped off. There is credence to people thinking that He was Elijah. The second to last verse in the Old Testament says Elijah will return before the great and terrible day of the Lord. To this day, many still say Jesus is nothing more than a great prophet.

The second question is one we must all answer.

## 2. Who do YOU say that I am?

Peter got an A: “You are the Christ”.

“Messiah” in Hebrew and “Christ” in Greek both mean “the anointed one”. This is the first time Jesus is called the Messiah. He had the right word, but did he have the right meaning?

“Messiah” carried overtones of salvation and deliverance. No wonder Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Like the blind man, the disciples were beginning to see but only dimly. They had the wrong idea of what “Christ” truly means. It was not until Pentecost that they could see clearly.

Jesus spoke plainly, boldly, directly and candidly: I will suffer. I will be rejected and will die.

Peter does not like this at all. I can see Peter putting his hand around the shoulder of Jesus and taking him aside. Peter wanted to explain a few things to Jesus. The Scriptures said the Messiah would conquer the enemy and not the other way around. At least he does not want to correct Jesus in the public.

Oh, I can see myself so many times like Peter. I think I am in control and understand the situation. I assume that I am in charge and Jesus has to line up behind me. I understand Peter because it is embarrassing to follow the One who will suffer, will be rejected, crucified and will die. Who wants to follow a loser? Peter's Christ was not going to suffer or be rejected or be killed. We love the resurrection, but the only way to the resurrection is through death. Who wants to hear it? Who will go through it?

The real Christ is the rejected Christ. If we're going to identify with the rejected Christ, that means a certain degree of rejection attaches to us. But if there's one thing we don't desire, it's what? **Rejection.** If there's one thing we crave, what is it? **Acceptance.** We have a feeling that if we identify with a rejected Christ, then we might find ourselves outside the camp.

Try to make a change in a church – even a small but good change. There will always be people who will disagree. You will be always rejected by someone. So for now I am always asking one question when I am thinking of a change: Will it make disciples of Christ? Does it help us fulfill God's mission?

If the answer is yes, I should not be worrying about pleasing all the people. Actually I should expect rejection.

“Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts.” Suddenly Peter's best day turned out into his worst day.



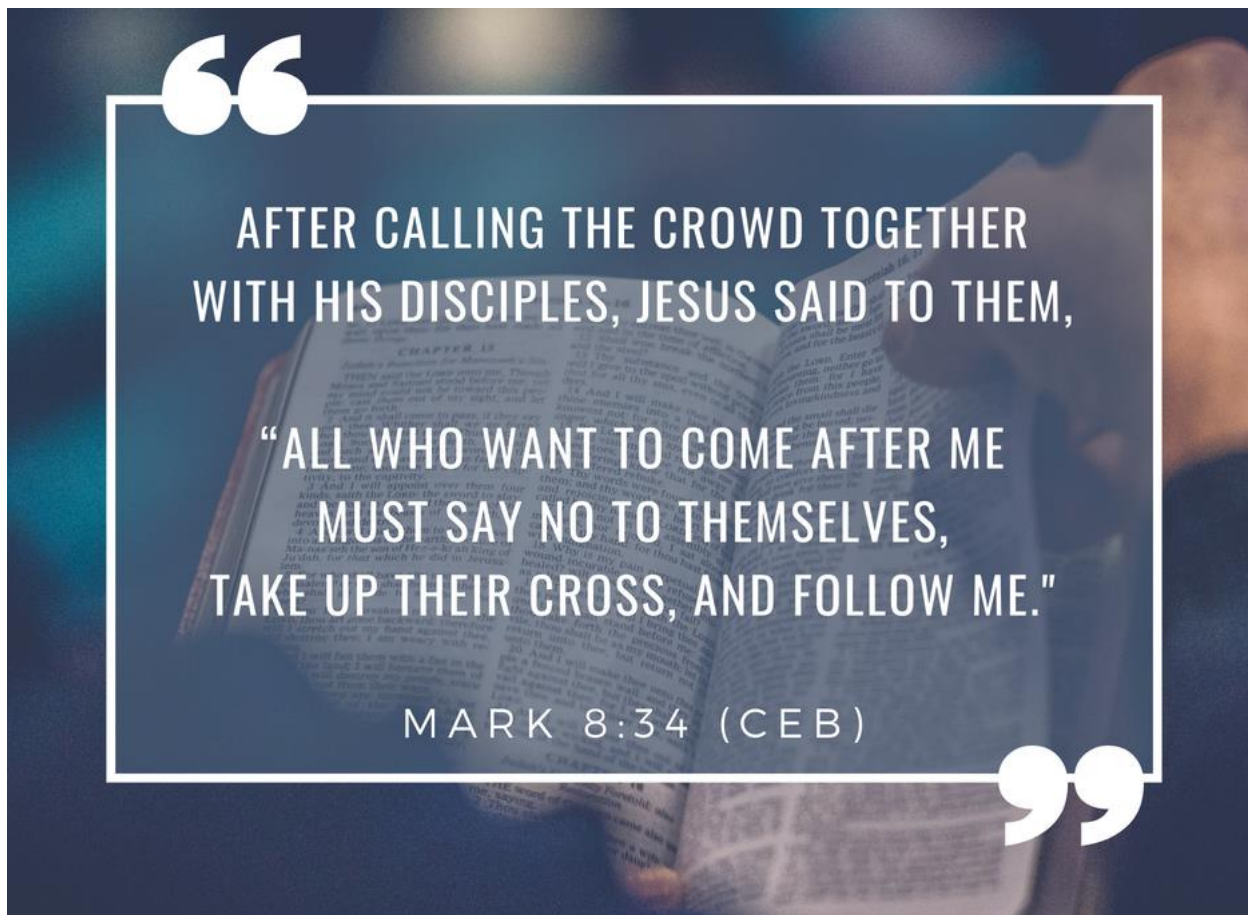
At the same time Jesus knew about temptation. Satan was again tempting Jesus to abandon His mission. This time it was through Peter, one of his closest friends.

Thinking human thoughts and not God's thoughts -- How do we think God's thoughts?

There is an excellent little book about Brother Lawrence who lived in the 1600's: "Practicing the Presence of God." John Wesley and many church leaders over the last 4 centuries have found it extremely helpful. How do we practice the presence of God?

We know the spiritual disciplines. An important one is to pray without ceasing.

Pray all the time. Yes, all the time. Ask God to give you His thoughts. How often do we ask God to give His thoughts? Join me in the mornings to start your day with a few minutes of the reading a Bible verse and meditating on it.



After calling the crowd together with his disciples, Jesus said to them, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.”

**All means everybody.** Nobody is forced or required, but if you want to come after Jesus, there is a cost, a high cost.

There are four things there that will show that a person is conforming to the pattern of discipleship that Christ outlined:

1. they **come after him**,
2. they **deny themselves, lose their lives**
3. they **take up their cross**,
4. they **keep on following him**.

I believe most of us can say for certain that we have decided to follow Jesus. But we stop at the second: Denying ourselves. Shouldn't Jesus tell us to affirm ourselves and care for ourselves? What does it mean denying? Losing your life?

Two examples come to mind: first is marriage. When you marry somebody you cannot live like you are single. Your life changes. You cannot spend your time like you spent when you were single. You cannot date others as you did when you were single. You can't spend money like you spend when you were single. Is your life worse? I hope not, but it is definitely not the same. You made a decision to love and care for somebody. In some sense you lose something to gain. The same is when you become a disciple. You have to recognize that you are not the follower of flesh, of your desires. You cannot love Jesus and love pleasures, comfort and all that feels good. It is no longer about you.

Second example is denying the "terrible two year old" inside of us. Jesus says, "Deny yourself." Put off the old self which is being corrupted and put on the new self. We can act like the most decent, respectable, righteous, church-going people until someone messes with our comfort—and then you better look out! Isn't that true? I remember when the Bible troopers said they will spend a night in the church. You know the thought came through my mind: "I hope I do not have to sleep in the church on the floor." I did not volunteer to do it! It would mess with my comfort. I think it is a big danger when all we seek is comfort. It has to be in the place I like and in the time that works for my schedule. It has to fit my interest. I am so guilty of it, too.

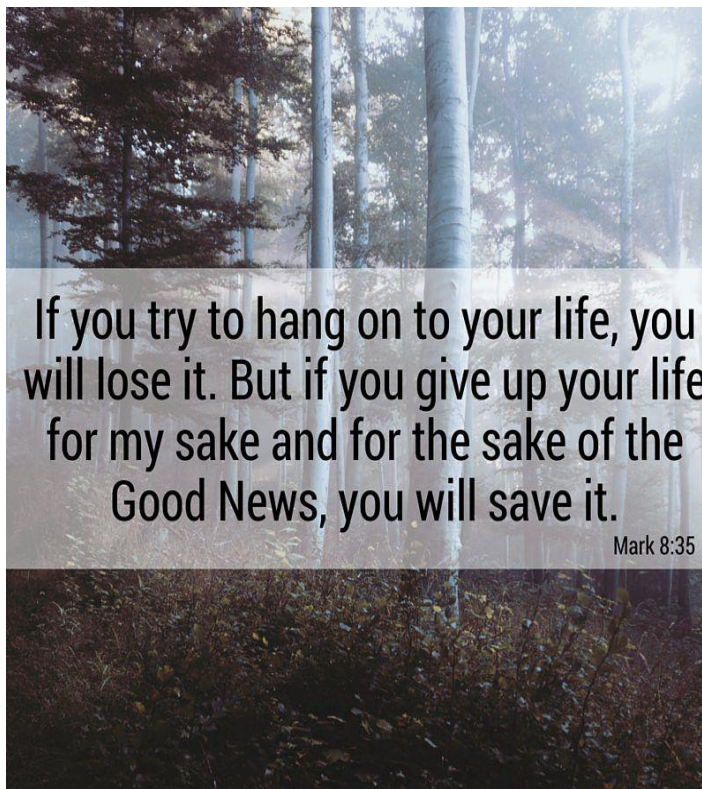
I think the discipline of fasting is so important in our Christian walk. I think it is inseparable with those who want a deeper walk with Christ. We all can do fasting in some form. Ask me how it is with my fasting from food. It is just too hard. I tried two weeks ago to fast. This two-year-old girl was screaming that she is starving. I just skipped breakfast and I was about to die at 2 PM. Surely I was not dying. It is so hard to step out of the comfort zone. How hard it is to choose what is good for your soul. In other words, the flesh constantly wants to be indulged and catered to.

In Galatians we read: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit (of God)." (Galatians 5)

Take up your cross. What do you hear when Jesus says this to you? The Cross might mean to you the resurrection, your sins are paid, your salvation. The cross for the first century people meant only one thing – a most shameful death.

Jesus says take up your cross. It does not mean you have to suffer insults, violence, a terrible job or bad relationships. It is not the burden to carry. It is a death to your desires, your life, all of you – so you can have a new life.

Jesus says: All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me and because of the good news will save them.



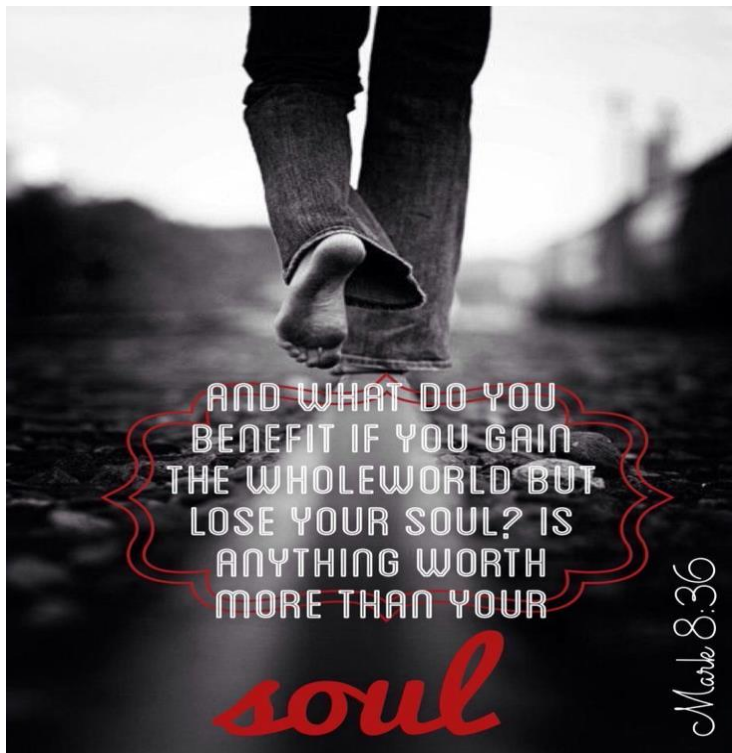
Die to my life. Can it be harder? But one thing for sure we have to keep in our minds is why we die. Not so we will be dead. But we will have life. Life that is abundant, life that is a peace and joy, not the joy that world gives us. It is life in the presence of God, life when you live with the strength that come from the Almighty, peace from Jesus and joy from the Holy Spirit. There has been many, many times when I would walk around the church praying, just giving all my thoughts, all my heart, my family, church all I have, to God. Next thing I will know is I am smiling and having joy. Nothing changed in my life. All the same problems, all the same hurts and challenges, but happiness that comes from God is not the same that comes from the world.

The Apostle Paul said, "I die daily". Starting the day just a little bit earlier, just a little bit out of your comfort zone, to give time to die to you and live to Jesus. Just during the day, sharing my faith with those I have known for years and to the strangers, just letting my schedule to be messed up because I will do something to feed my soul and to love my neighbor, just at home not loose myself in the virtual world but dive in the time with the loved ones and in the word of God.

**What determines whether your life is wasted or invested is your attitude toward Jesus.**

Is He Christ for you?

Jesus asks a third question: It really is two questions.



3. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Is your life built so you gain world? How is it with your soul? Do you give priority to your soul?

He calls us to die to our old selves, so that *his* self—his heart, soul, mind, and strength—might be more fully alive in us.