

Three Brief Questions of Eternal Importance

(Mark 8:34-38)

(preached 4/5/15 Pine Grove BC; **Easter Sunday**)

Introduction

Take your Bible and turn with me to Mark 8:34-38...

If I were forced to pick one passage to preach from the gospel of Mark, it would be this passage.

Because it is such a key passage in our day.

This passage tells us what it means to be truly saved in this world straight from the mouth of Jesus.

There is no more important question than “are you really saved?”

Are you a genuine follower of Jesus Christ?

Well, listen as Jesus describes what that look like..

Mark 8:34-38...

³⁴ And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever wishes to save his ^[u]life will lose it, but whoever loses his ^[u]life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and

forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ 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.”

(LET US PRAY.)

I always said that I would never be a fan of animated movies.

They seems so silly to me.

Then I had kids and now I have come to love some of the animated movies out there.

Cars is one of my favorites of all of them.

In that movie, a race car is stranded in the middle of nowhere and needs to get to a big race..

But while in the small town, he makes a few friends.

And he also learns a few things about racing.

In one of the scenes, he is out racing on a dirt track but can't seem to get the hang of it..

He has only raced on hard surfaces and he keeps spinning out when he goes into a turn on the dirt...

Well one of the cars in the town in an old dirt track racer...

And he eventually comes to him and offers some advice on how to make the turns on the dirt track...

And his simple piece of advice was this...

In dirt track racing, "turn right to go left."

The racecar laughs off the advice, but eventually realizes that turning left actually made his car go right.

Now, advice like that seems so contrary to our way of thinking.

Turn right to go left?!

How is that possible, yet it is true when it comes to racing on dirt.

Now there are other truths in this world that when we say them seem so contradictory.

Jumbo Shrimp.

The Sound of Silence.

Artificial Grass.

Electric Candle.

The Great Depression.

Pretty Ugly.

Those are all phrases where the words seem to be opposite.

When it comes to biblical Christianity, and the idea of what it means to be truly saved...

There are some truths that seem so contradictory when you say them, but they are foundational to what it means to be saved...

I want to read them to you this morning before we look at this passage...

#1....Salvation is absolutely free, but it will absolutely cost you everything.

That is not saying that you must work your way to heaven.

The Bible never teaches that, but it is saying that the way to heaven comes at a high price...

We are going to look at that price this morning...

#2....If you want to save your life, you need to lose it.

Biblical Christianity is the story of giving up to get.

And we will also look at that this morning as well.

I have entitled this message....

THREE BRIEF QUESTIONS OF ETERNAL IMPORTANCE

The questions that will come to you today will only last a few minutes...

But the answers will affect you for eternity.

This morning, we are going to look at words of Jesus on what it means to truly follow him...

And I use the word truly because the world is filled with false followers of Christ..

There are even some false followers of Christ in the Bible.

Just like there is counterfeit money, clothes, watches and pocketbooks...

There are counterfeit Christians....

One of the most frightening verses in all the Bible are the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord,

Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many ^[u]miracles?’²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.

That verse alone proves that the world will be filled with people who claim Jesus as Lord but deny him with their life...

It is amazing to me that if you walk into a bank with a counterfeit \$100 bill, there is no way the teller will say to you...

“Well, that is close enough. We will take it.”

Yet, we will tell that to anybody who tries to pose as a Christian...

Oh, that’s close enough. If you know Jesus, that’s good enough.

If you said a prayer, that’s close enough.

If you got wet in the waters of baptism, that’s close enough.

If you joined a church, that’s close enough

And we will never examine them anymore.

We never check for fruit in their life.

Let me be clear.

You are not showing Christian love to someone when you tell them that what they did was close enough.

Giving someone the benefit of the doubt when they are wondering if they are truly saved is not being kind or gracious.

It is equal to seeing a baby playing on a train tracks and saying in your mind...

“Well, he probably knows how to crawl out of the way when the train comes.”

A bank teller will examine a bill up and down or risk losing her job.

If she loves her job and wants to please her boss, she is expected to examine every bill that passes through her hands.

May we be just as faithful to our Lord to examine the claims of everyone who says they are a Christian.

And there is no better time to examine your life than to hold it up to the words of Jesus in Mark 8:34-38..

Are you a true believer in Jesus Christ?

The first question to ask yourself is...

I. Have You Stopped Loving Yourself? (34-35)

In verse 34, Jesus is in a small area in northern Israel in the town of Caesarea Philippi...

He is getting ready to march south to the cross at Jerusalem.

His death is getting closer and closer with every passing day.

And he has concentrated his teaching upon the 12 disciples who are with him....

But in this passage, he calls the crowd in to also hear what he was saying...

And this crowd would have been made of both Jews and Gentiles most likely...

And he lays down a challenge of sorts to the crowd....

IF anyone wishes to come after me...

And what follows are the requirements of following after Jesus...

This is an invitation of sorts, but it is also a test...

Look, the day will come when my 2 year old son, says the following, I am a better fisherman than my daddy...

Or a better whatever (fill in the blank...)

Well, how does every father respond to that claim?

“Talk is cheap. Show me that you are better.”

“Let’s go the lake or the ball field or wherever and if you can catch more fish, then I will acknowledge that you are better.”

Well all understand this...

Jesus is simply saying here....

Anyone can follow me.

The invitation goes out to any and everyone..

But if you say that you follow me, here are the requirements for being my disciple...

First, you need to deny yourself...

You need to stop living to serve your needs and your sinful desires and your agenda....

You want a picture of what this looks like...

Get yourself out of the center of the universe and acknowledge that God is the center of the universe.

You now exist to serve Him and not yourself.

Give up your independence.

And submit yourself to God..

Change the attitude of “Nobody tells me what to do” into....

I am a willing servant of my Lord.

The focus every morning you open your eyes is not what can I do to please myself...

But what can I do to please Christ.....

That is self denial...

Then Jesus adds that his true disciples must take up a cross and follow Him.

Two things, when Jesus said this about a cross, no one yet knows that Jesus is going to die this way...

He hasn't told his disciples that yet..

He just told them that He would suffer and be killed...

But they didn't know how it would happen.
Their only knowledge of a cross was what they had witnessed with their own eyes...

Crucifixion was a Roman way of death...

In 70 BC, a group of slaves tried to rebel against Rome and overthrow the empire.

Well, 6,000 of the slaves were defeated and captured alive.

They were forced to build their own crosses and carry and drag them to Rome.

Then all 6,000 slaves were hung on their crosses on the main road leading out of Rome to the south...

As a warning to anyone who even thought about revolting against the empire...

There were also others killed on the cross during the disciples lifetime...

So when they thought of a cross they thought of a cruel way to die...

Yet, Jesus said his disciples needed to pick up a cross and follow him...

May people confuse the idea of carrying a cross to minor inconveniences in the world..

Carrying a cross is nothing like that....

It not being stuck in a bad job.

Its not having car trouble.

Its not having financial problems.....

Carrying your cross is your willingness to suffer because you are associated with Christ.

It is being shunned by family and friends because you reject their unrighteousness and sinfulness...

It is being persecuted at work because you believe every word of the Bible...

Carrying your cross is doing the right thing because you love your Savior, even though it may cost you something in the world...

That is what it means to carry a cross and follow Jesus.

You simply come to deny who you once were and the life you once lived in order to live a life that honors Jesus Christ...

Even if doing so brings mockery, shame, and persecution into your life.

And so, the first question you must ask yourself this morning is have you stopped loving yourself and your life?

Have you picked up a cross and followed Jesus?

Or are you someone who loves your life during the week but shows up at church so others have a better impression of you?

Or are you someone who claims to carry a cross but quickly lays it down when it causes problems in your family or at work?

To follow Jesus, you lay down your life to never pick it up again...

And you pick up your cross to never lay it down again..

The second question to ask yourself this morning is this...

II. Have You Stopped Loving this World? (36-37)

Just last week in California, a woman was supposedly kidnapped from her boyfriend's home.

After 2 days, she turned up unharmed and the police now believe it was all a hoax.

One of the things that tipped the police off was that the kidnappers only asked for \$8,500 as ransom for her safe return.

Such a low number led police to believe that it was all staged, and it turns out they were right.

But what is the value of a human life?

Certainly, it is more than \$8,500, but what price do we put on it.

How much are your worth?

The truth about every person in this world is that all our lives will go on forever.

The only question is will we go on forever in judgment away from God in hell?

Are will we go on forever in the glorious presence of God in heaven.

And so Jesus asks the ultimate question.

What is your life worth?

Will you trade your entire eternity for the passing pleasures of this world?

Will you give up your soul for the here and now?

Are you more concerned about the next five minutes than the next 1000 years.....

Are you so focused on this world that you can't see past your own nose?

Do you really love the things of this world so much that you would be willing to trade the world to come for the world of today?

Nearly every winner of the lottery takes the lump sum amount.

Even though it means that they may give away millions of dollars to do it...

And even though it is clear that the taxes would be less to do the payments over time...

95% take the lump sum amount.

Why?

They want their money now.

They can't envision the future.

Look, I understand...

With an uncertain future, it may be wise to take the money and run even if it is much less...

But let me tell you something, your financial future may be uncertain....

But your spiritual future is as certain as the word of God...

You will pass from this life into the next, and there is no second chance...

Taking the lump of sin in this life comes at a high price...

Because it will cost you your soul in eternity.

The true followers of Jesus are not focused on this world...

Instead, they are focused on the world to come...

You cannot love this world or the things of this world and love Jesus..

This world is passing away but your eternity is fast approaching..

It is time to stop loving the world and start loving the One who made this world...

Are you in love with this world this morning?

Is your mind wandering now to the things of this world so much that you can't even focus on the things of God that are being preached in your ears?

Today is the day to stop your love affair with yourself and with this world...

But there is one more question to see if you are a true follower of Christ....

III. Have You Stopped Loving the Praises of Man (38)

Verse 38...

³⁸ 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 church today is obsessed with celebrity.

We want so bad to find someone who will Christianity to the main stream of society so that it will be fashionable to love Jesus.

So we grab on to anyone who might be that person.

Kirk Cameron, Duck Dynasty, 19 kids and counting, Tim Tebow, and the list goes on and on...

Let me tell you something....

Christianity will never be popular in the world.

And you know why, the world hates Jesus!

John 15:18ff

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, ^[e]you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A

slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

If you think that following Jesus will get you pats on the back and popularity, think again.

Following Jesus will bring funny stares and laughter into your life.

People will think you are odd and backwards.

They will accuse you of living by a book written 1000s of years ago.

They will call you a party pooper.

They will ridicule how you raise our kids, what movies you refuse to watch, what words you refuse to say...

They will ridicule you when you don't laugh at their jokes.

They will call you all kinds of names.

Following Jesus will not lead to getting the praises of men.

Believing and living by his word may cost you a job or a relationship.

Today, when you say that you believe the Bible, you are labelled as intolerant or worse.

Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart.

Because it is going to put you in spots that will cause you to either stand for Christ or seek the applause of man.

That's why Jesus says if you are ashamed of Him, he will be ashamed of you.

When it comes to being ashamed, there are only 2 groups in the entire world...

Group 1 is ashamed of Jesus...

They are ashamed of the Bible.

They are ashamed of God.

They are ashamed of Christianity...

And that shame simply forces them to go and stand with the world..

Group 2 is ashamed of themselves...

They are ashamed of their sin.

They are ashamed of their lifestyle.

They are ashamed of how they have rejected God for all these years...

And that shame simply forces them to go and stand with Jesus, who is only one who can remove that shame through his sacrifice on the cross.

Shame is a powerful force and it either pushes you to stand with the world or to stand with Jesus Christ.

You either love the praises of men or you love to give praise to God.

There is no option 3...

Today is the day to stop being ashamed of Christ and stand with Him.

Conclusion

Today is Easter Sunday, and 1000s of churches in the eastern time zone are wrapping up their services right now.

And in most churches, now is the time for the invitation, where the people are invited to come and follow Jesus.

Unfortunately, we live in a day where those invitations are more about the words of the preacher than the words of the Bible...

Because preachers are wrapping up their sermons now and asking people to follow Jesus...

And in this day and age, that invitation takes all kinds of forms.

For some, they are begging people to walk an aisle...

Or to sign a card, or to say a certain prayer..

Or to bow at the altar or to raise a hand.

But I want you to know that the passage we just examined is simply Jesus' invitation to you.

Because He begins this passage with, "if anyone wants to come after me.."

And notice what follows is not any of those things that I just mentioned...

He doesn't say, "If anyone wishes to come after me,..."

Then pray this prayer or raise that hand or walk that aisle...

Jesus' invitation is nothing like that, yet 1000s of people are hanging on to a prayer, a trip down an aisle, a card they signed as a kid, or a hand they raised in church

And shame on preachers who change invitations to manipulate people into following Jesus.

Telling people that God has a wonderful plan for your life is not the gospel.

In fact, what we have seen today is nowhere near a wonderful plan for your life..

Denial of self...

Carrying a cross...

Losing your life...

Being ashamed of yourself...

Doesn't sound like a wonderful plan to me...

Look, I feel the pressure.

It is Easter Sunday.

It would be a great encouragement to our church to see these aisles filled and this altar flooded with people...

I could play on your emotions and get people down here..

I could beg and plead and play some music or dim the lights or tell a sad story or try to scare you with a tragic story of someone dying...

And people would come, and we would all probably leave feeling better...

But I would not be a faithful under shepherd of the Good Shepherd if I changed his words to suit my desires...

If you want to come after Jesus today or any day, His words are clear...

Stop loving Yourself.

Stop loving this World.

And

Stop loving the praise of man.

Repent of your sin and trust only in Christ.

That is the true gospel.

That is also an open invitation to any who wish to follow Jesus.

If anyone wished to follow after him, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus.

And those aren't my words, those are the words of Jesus Himself.

That invitation goes out this morning to everyone here.

Salvation is free for anyone today, but it will cost you everything.

Let us pray.