

Sermon for March 1, 2015 – Lent 2

Mark 8:31-38 (NIV84)

Theme: **What do you have in mind?**

- 1) *The Things of Men.*
- 2) *The Things of God.*

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? ³⁷ Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Since God clearly promises to watch over all who hold on to him in faith, is it wrong for Christians to expect a life of health, wealth and earthly ease – and to complain if we don’t get it?

But then we see images on TV: believers in Christ being persecuted and killed. We wonder: “if these Middle Eastern Christians trust in the almighty God, why doesn’t the LORD rescue them. Their persecutors are mocking Jesus. They are blaspheming the LORD. This is not the way it should be!”

And thus our hearts show that we, like Peter, don’t quite understand what discipleship is all about. It’s not about glory, prestige and comfort in this life. Discipleship is all about following Christ – dying to the world that we might live with Him.

Let us, then, listen to Jesus explain what it means to follow him, under the theme: **What do you have in mind?)** *The things of men or the things of God?*

Our sermon text takes place right after Peter made his great confession about Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."ⁱ Jesus called Peter blessed for being able to make such a confession and went on to explain to the disciples what this confession meant: how He, the Son of God, would be glorified through his work of saving us. We read:

³¹ He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Jesus wanted his disciples prepared for what they were about to experience in Jerusalem. He knew that his suffering and death would put their faith to such a test, that they would abandon him. He wanted them to understand that this was God’s plan for their salvation, that no matter how hopeless things looked, He would rise from the dead in victory.

³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

It seems as if Peter had painted a comic book “superhero” picture of Jesus in his mind - so much so that he could not accept Jesus’ words about his suffering and death. They went against the glory Peter imagined his superhero would win. And so Peter took it upon himself to straighten Jesus out: “No, LORD, you got it all wrong. You are the Christ, the Son of God. You came to usher in a new era of peace and glory for Israel. No, Lord, this shall never happen to you!”

But, before we hastily condemn Peter’s foolish rebuke, let’s take a moment to consider our own thoughts. You see, we also are minded to think that God doesn’t always quite get it; and that we, every now and then, need to straighten him out: “No God, this isn’t how it’s supposed to be: ISIS should not be killing all those Christians. Your people shouldn’t have to suffer ridicule for your name. Life should be easier for us because you are our Almighty God.” And so, like Peter, we find ourselves correcting God because His actions don’t seem to match our idea of how things should be.

It is no wonder, then, that Jesus so publicly and sharply rebuked Peter, saying: “*Get behind me, Satan! . . . You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*” The disciples still didn’t get what it meant that Jesus was the Christ. They didn’t understand that His glory was not in being served, *but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”ⁱⁱⁱ

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we all are tempted to view glory and greatness in human terms. We, like Peter, want Jesus to be a “Superman,” someone who can easily defeat our enemies – allowing us to pursue earthly ease and happiness. But this is not the reality. Our greatest enemy is not some person like “Lex Luthor.” It’s our own wicked hearts that have rightly merited God’s anger and punishment. And because our enemy is not some person or terrorist organization, but our very nature, we need a different kind of hero than our sinful minds desire. We need a God who is willing to take our place in order to save us from the hellfire our sins have earned. We need a Savior who is willing to suffer and die.

Thankfully Jesus was not minded like Peter. He knew exactly who the enemy was and what He had to do to defeat him. Even though the road to saving us would be filled with ridicule, suffering, and shame, Christ was willing to bear that cross in order to save us. This is his greatest glory. And it is a glory to which He calls all of us as well.

Knowing the threat our sinful self poses to our salvation, Jesus *called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*³⁵ *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

I don’t think we fully comprehend how shocking Jesus statement was to the crowd that gathered around him. We see the cross as a decoration. They saw the cross as a most horrific and gruesome instrument of torture – reserved for the worst of the worst.

To put it in modern terms, Jesus is saying: “If you want to be my disciple, you need to be willing to go through the same earthly humiliation, suffering and death that I endured for you – willing to give up everything for my sake. If you want to be my disciple, you need to be like those Egyptian Christians, who ISIS, two weeks ago, marched before the world’s eyes and slaughtered like sheep – for the glory of my name.”

Now to deny ourselves like this is certainly something we cannot do on our own. Thankfully, Christ does not leave us alone. When God the Father declared us to be his children in baptism, He gave us a gift: the Holy Spirit himself, who, working through the Gospel, makes our reluctant hearts willing to give up everything for Christ’s sake.

Members of Immanuel, do you really understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ? As I mentioned before, one of our greatest enemies is our sinful, selfish nature that desires ease, comfort, and pleasure for itself. If we live to satisfy our sinful self, we will ultimately lose the true life Christ won for us on the cross. How so? As Jesus said elsewhere, *the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things [will] come in and choke the word from our hearts.*ⁱⁱⁱ *When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, those who love self more than Christ will quickly fall away.*^{iv}

But if we (with the Spirit's aid) deny our sinful selves by prayerfully focusing our attention on the eternal salvation Jesus won for us through His cross, then we will be able to drown our sinful self through daily contrition and repentance so that our new man (given to us at baptism) might arise to live to God's glory. As we focus on what Christ accomplished for us through His cross, taking up our crosses for Christ becomes much easier. We will begin to understand what the apostle Paul meant in today's Epistle lesson, when he wrote: *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*⁵ *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*^v

Jesus asks: ³⁶ *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?* ³⁷ *Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

What good will your beautiful house, fancy car, boat, iPhone, and stock portfolio be when you are dead? What good will all those things be when you stand before God, and He asks you what you did with the time, talents and treasure He entrusted to your care? Will the fact that you pursued these things instead of Christ impress God and win His favor? Will you be able to trade them in for heaven? The obvious answer is no. Only one thing can redeem our souls from hell: the salvation Jesus won for us through His cross; the salvation we only possess through faith. And this is exactly why our faith in Christ is the most precious gift we have from God, a gift for which Christians are willing to give up everything – even life itself.

³⁸ *If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.*"

This world hates Christianity – and you don't have to live in Iraq to experience it. Even in our community the devil works hard to silence the Gospel. He does all he can to make us feel too scared or ashamed to confess the truth to others because of what people might think. But don't be ashamed of the Gospel. Why not? *Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*^{vi}

And this is exactly why we are willing to give up everything (even life itself) for the Gospel's sake. We aren't concerned about what people think about us, rather what we care about is this: does my life, (my words and actions) give the world a clear and accurate picture of who Jesus is and His saving love for fallen mankind?

Dear Christian, what do you have in mind? The things of men or the things of God? What is most important for you: the comfort of your flesh, or that Jesus is glorified on this earth? Are you so ashamed of Jesus that you don't witness him to the world? Or are you so ashamed of this sinful world that you are compelled to proclaim Christ to it – even if it means losing your life in the process?

Many times we have dropped the cross, to follow the world. But dear Christian, look at how Jesus saved you. Though we have been unfaithful, he has remained faithful and has forgiven all our sins. Remember the price Jesus paid for you and also what he has saved us for: eternal life with him in paradise! With Christ's love in your hearts, pick up the cross and follow Jesus. In him, even your troubles and sufferings

will become a joy. With him at our side: we willingly lose all – knowing that, if we possess him, we have lost nothing at all. Amen

ⁱ Mat 16:16 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱ Mark 10:45 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 4:19 (NIV84)

^{iv} Mark 4:17 (NIV84)

^v Romans 5:2-5 (NIV84)

^{vi} Rom 1:16 (NIV84)