

Mark 8:27—33
August 5, 2018

A paradox is a sentence that doesn't seem to make sense but upon reflection and review—it does. And it usually does so in a surprising way.

Here are a few—

- 'Less is more.'
- 'What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young.' *George Bernard Shaw*
- "I can resist anything but temptation." *Oscar Wilde*
- "I know one thing, that I know nothing." *Socrates*

Today, as we join Jesus on the road with his followers we are going to overhear arguably the most famous Christian paradox ever spoken.

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

We are going to find that statement is not just true for a few but for all people everywhere.

Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

How does that make any sense? Let's find out:

"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. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and

said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 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. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? 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.”

9 And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”
Mark 8:31—9:1

PRAY

We have been following Jesus around the northern reaches of Palestine getting to know him on the way. We have been following him, listening to him, and watching him.

The disciples have too. Last week they showed that they knew who he was—Peter proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the long awaited Christ. After millennia, the anointed one was among them!

Hurrah!
Finally!
Yes!

The disciples after being with him for 18 months finally recognized who he was. But just because they were able to see who he is—that did not mean that understood all he had come to do.

The disciples—like all Jews—expected that the coming of the Christ meant the end of trouble. They believed that the Christ would immediately elevate God’s people to glory and defeat all their enemies bring justice and rule forever.

Jesus would do all those things—but on a scale that they did not yet comprehend. For Jesus to rule and make all things right—first he had to suffer, be rejected, die and rise again.

Specifically, Jesus had to be fastened on a Roman cross like a thief and die. The disciples understood none of this and so Jesus had a lot to teach them. He would teach them as they made their way to Jerusalem.

What was a triumphant moment of revelation becomes uber-awkward when Jesus says, “Get behind me Satan!” to Peter.

That is more than a mild rebuke—it is a withering, offensive, even repulsive response. Jesus had to die to live.

Now he starts again to teach—he calls the crowd that was assembled around him to come close and teaches what it means to follow a Christ who would suffer, be rejected and die.

Two points—

1. Following Jesus is costly—

This lesson from seems like the opposite of ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People.’

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 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.”

What is Jesus saying?

Most urgently, you need to understand that Jesus is not talking about how to BECOME a Christian instead he is talking about how Christians are to live.

To experience real life—you must die. Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

Jesus is not talking about a physical death—he is talking about something much more difficult. He is saying—any who follow me live a life of self-denial and of constant death.

What does it mean to talk up a cross?

On any given day, walking into Jerusalem you would be able to witness people writhing in the throes of death up on a cross.

It was a grizzly powerful tool to keep the rebellious Jewish populace in line. No Roman soldier would ever

carry a cross to the place of execution. It was left for the condemned person to put the cross bar on their shoulders and trudge to their own execution.

Each person in the crowd knew the experience of watching some tortured soul slog under the weight of a cross beam. It was a march toward death. No one who carried their own cross ever came back.

Jesus is saying—whoever would want to follow me—understand you are walking to your own execution. He explains further what he means in verse 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.”

He is not saying that to be a Christian is to let go of your personality and what makes you unique. He is not saying that we ought to get rid of fun and pleasures. He is not saying that you are to lose yourself in him. He is not saying that we ought to get rid our individuality. He is not saying that we have a life of misery awaiting us.

Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

You must be at the disposal of Jesus.

The road of a Christian is not going to be fulfillment of all our ambitions and dreams in this life—the road to find who we really are is by giving all that we are to Jesus.

As Christians, we know that we have been forgiven of our every sin. We know that we have an advocate in

heaven at the right hand praying for us. We know that God is our father and we are loved.

We know this—and Jesus is saying—here is what it means to live as a Christian

Deny yourself, kill self-sufficiency and go wherever I go. That is what Jesus is saying. That is what it means to be a Christian.

Salvation is not just being forgiven and freed of all our sins—but also—your salvation means you are bought and paid for at the execution of Jesus. He paid for your life by giving his own life.

And if you try and define yourself in any other way besides Jesus you will fail.

Self-denial is hard and it will feel like death. Jesus puts difficult people in your life so that you can deny yourself and remember that you follow Jesus.

Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

Denial of self will feel like death—but otherwise we really following him.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

This is not an adventure in self-abasement. I’m no good—I have nothing to offer. Losing your life is NOT constantly being down on yourself and thinking that you are no good.

Rather, it is putting yourself at the complete disposal of Jesus—for his purposes and not your own. Because if you try and bring meaning to your life by what you do—you won't understand who you are.

But if you give yourself to him and his use—you will become who you were always meant to be.

Lewis said it this way in his Screwtape letters a unique book where a master demon gives advice to a younger demon. He says—

“When He [God] talks of their losing their selves, He means only abandoning the clamor of self-will; once they have done that, He really gives them back all their personality, and boasts (I am afraid, sincerely) that when they are wholly His they will be more themselves than ever.” C.S. Lewis

That is what Jesus is saying—when you give all control to him—you gain everything.

Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

He is saying—when you think of yourself—think of me first. Because if you think of yourself first—what you want; what you hope; how you define worth—your life will lose meaning.

What is he saying?

- Build your identity on me.
- Find your worth in me.

- Put your expectations on me.
- Pile your hopes on me.
- Cast your burdens on me.

What does a life of self-denial mean? It can mean many things—but it always means putting Jesus first. It means obeying Jesus even when we don't want to. And the opportunities to deny self comes in the midst of our daily lives. In our personal relationships.

It means—

- Being kind to people that are not like you at all.
- Speaking words to build others up.
- Serving people when it is not convenient for you.
- Thinking first of the interests of others even when those people have been consistently unkind to you.
- Thinking the best of others and not drawing judgmental conclusions.
- Loving people who don't love you back.
- Refusing to take slights from others personally.
- Asserting the rights of others instead of your own.
- Refusing to be offended at the slights and differences with other people.
- Overlooking the failures of others even when they impact you.
- Investing in people who have nothing to offer you.
- Freely forgiving those who have wronged you.
- Refusing avoid someone else because they wronged you.

Now you might think—this following Jesus business sounds no good at all. I don't want to die to what I want to do.

Following Jesus is costly but NOT follow Jesus is more costly.

2. NOT following Jesus is MORE costly—

Jesus anticipates the question that was on the lips of all his hearers. Why would I ever want to do that? Why would I ever want to deny myself like that?

Exactly.

Is that how Jesus' invitation sound to you? That is no good—I'll pass. A life of self-denial and putting myself at the disposal of Jesus. No thanks.

You want to do what you want to do. You want to be free to define who you are by yourself without any control from Jesus.

You don't want to pay the costly price of following him—you want to do your own thing.

I get that, but listen to what Jesus says again. NOT following Jesus is much more costly than following him.

³⁶For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷For what can a man give in return for his soul?

He is saying if you go after what you want by yourself you will pay a much dearer price than self-denial—you will forfeit your eternal soul.

You might think your happiness is bound up in attaining things or fame or money or reputation or influence.

And Jesus says—Imagine you achieve all of those things—imagine you give your life fully over to achieving all of those things.

What do you have?

Nothing.

Not only will you never find meaning in what you achieve or what you have—but also you will lose your soul. And there is nothing more precious than your eternal soul.

Nothing.

You see, when you decide to go at life alone without Jesus what you are saying is—I can make myself happy by myself. I can find fulfillment by myself.

And Jesus is saying—you can't.

And he does a thought experiment. He is saying—imagine you get everything that you think that will make you happy.

It won't and you will lose your most precious possession—your very life. You might be radically successful and be the envy of everyone—gaining all there is in the world.

You still lose. Because you lose your soul.

If you clutch and grasp for control of your own life you will never know what real life is. And you will lose your eternal soul in the pursuit of things that cannot make you happy. Things that cannot bring you peace or fulfillment.

What good are you doing if you gain all that you would ever want and lose all that matters?

It may be hard to follow Jesus but it is inexpressibly more difficult NOT to follow him and go your own way.

I want to speak to those here who are not convinced that following Jesus is 'worth it'. I want you especially to understand what Jesus is saying here. He is saying even if you gain all that you ever hoped for and all your dreams come true—even then you lose your soul. That is a poor bargain.

Let me show you what I mean.

It might sound hard to hear Jesus say—

“If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

But here is the reality of things—Anything you give your life to will demand all of your life.

Do you want money?

- Money calls out and says—“If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

To get real money you must give up many things—you must live a life of sacrifice—deny yourself many things in order to follow after money.

How many people have sacrificed all in the pursuit of money? How many have given up everything for just a little bit more? How many have lost themselves following after money only to realize too late that their pursuit of money not only did not bring happiness but cost their very souls?

It is not worth it.

Maybe you live for independence.

- Independence calls out and says—“If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

No one can tell you what to do—and if they try you are out of there. You will sacrifice any and everything in order to be in control and call your own shots. In the name of independence you deny yourself and sacrifice much in order to follow after it.

How many people have sacrificed all in the pursuit of maintaining control? If you try and maintain the façade of control, you will both NOT find happiness but also you will lose your life.

It is not worth it.

Maybe you don't give your life for money or Independence—maybe for you it is a

- Your job calls out and says——“If any would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

And so you do. You log the long hours. You burn the midnight oil. You make the deal. You earn the promotion. You gain respect...at work.

You work yourself to death. You give yourself to projects at work so that when you are home you aren't really home. You are following after all your job can give.

How many people have sacrificed all following after your work? So many and not if they could speak now they would bellow—it is not worth it. Your eternal soul is so much more valuable than doing well at work.

Maybe you aren't chasing after money, independence or a job—maybe for you—you are running after Leisure.

- Leisure calls out and says——“If any would come after, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

And so you do. You live to have fun and 'unplug.' You live to go on vacation. You deny yourself many things so that you can 'get a little rest.'

So many people have sacrificed so much running after leisure—never really finding it.

Not worth it.

What are you chasing?

An Escape? (through drugs and alcohol)

Sex?

Respect?

Physical fitness?

Education?

Fame?

All of those things will call out and say to you—“If any would come after, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

And if you do—you will lose your soul. It is not worth it.

Everything we are tempted to live for apart from Christ demand no less than Jesus but they always falls short. That is why Jesus—even if you gain the world—you end up losing if you deny me.

Every time.

I won't lie to you—following Jesus is difficult but it is a piece of cake compared to NOT following Jesus. Today can be the day that you find out what it really means to live.

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”

If you want to find yourself—who you were really meant to be—you must come to Jesus. You must put yourself at his disposal and say—save me! I need you!

And he will.

Every time.

I can promise that whatever you are denying outside of Jesus will not pay off.

How about today—

- You turn from asking money to save you—and look to Jesus?
- You turn from asking independence to save you—and look to Jesus?
- You turn from asking your job to save you—and look to Jesus?
- You turn from asking leisure to save you—and look to Jesus?

Christians—

Let us remember how worthwhile living for Jesus is!

It is normal to have a hard go of it following Jesus. Normal and expected. He tells us right here.

“If any would come after, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Hard but worth it. Two more reasons here in this text—

We get a picture of how much even as we listen to his voice here in verse 38,

³⁸For 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.”

You might think—how is that encouraging?

If Jesus will publicly renounce those who are ashamed of him when he comes in glory—the reverse is true. One day—on the day of days—you who were not ashamed to deny yourself and follow Jesus will not be ashamed of you God the Father.

You will not be sorry that day even though these days may be difficult.

Another reason for great confidence—

9:1,

And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

All of those gathered that day saw the kingdom of God come with power.

How?

The Christ who suffered many things, was rejected and died—rose again from the dead. He defeated death once and for all.

The kingdom of God has come upon us with power.

Though the road by hard following Jesus—we are not left alone.

We have the risen Christ ruling over all things.
Praying for us by name.
Being our refuge and strength.

You see it might be hard to deny yourself and follow Jesus—but he does not ask you to go alone. The kingdom has come with power and we have tasted of that power. And we can experience that power in Christ.

How are you following Jesus?

Lose your life for Jesus and you will find real life.

