

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 8:34 - The Good News Requires Your Whole Life

These are some amazing words spoken by our Lord. And because of their significance we're going to slow down a little over the next few Sundays and unpack the significance of what Jesus is saying here. This morning we're really just going to focus on **Vs. 34**.

Here Jesus is telling us what a disciple is. In following verses he'll tell us why we should be a disciple, the logic of following Jesus and the attitude of a disciple. But, here, in **Vs. 34** it's simply telling us what a disciple is.

The big picture here is that following Jesus is a total life commitment. We would probably all say that we believe that, but as we think about this passage this morning I think it may be a cold splash of water as we are reminded afresh just exactly what Jesus has called us to. This is an all-encompassing call on all of our lives.

Remember Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Christ! That's amazing, his eyes are opened to the truth of the gospel. But then Peter rebuked Jesus when Jesus spoke of being crucified and rising again, and Jesus called him Satan in front of all the apostles.

So Peter's had a rough day. But Jesus isn't done with him. In fact, he gathers everyone around. When Peter made the confession it was just Jesus and the 12, but now Jesus gets everyone around - all the crowds. He wants to make it clear what it means to follow him.

That's why he says, "If anyone would come after me." If anyone desires to come after me. Open invitation. If you have a desire to follow Jesus, great. That's a good thing. We should want people to want to follow Jesus.

The problem is that a lot of people want to follow Jesus on their own terms. They want to dictate what the relationship is going to be like.

They like the Hallmark card sayings of Jesus, but they don't like the controversial passages.

They want social politeness, but they don't want to have to say hard truths in public.

They want other people to stop sinning, but don't get in their business about sin.

Jesus says anyone can come. Anyone. But on one condition: unconditional surrender.

When Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945 it was an unconditional surrender. They were at the complete mercy of the Allies or else they would face "prompt and utter destruction" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender\\_of\\_Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surrender_of_Japan)). Well, that's not too far from what we see Jesus saying here.

Jesus is going to set the terms for his followers. Jesus decides what it means to follow him.

For Peter, the day doesn't get easier, the day gets harder because Jesus makes it clear that while it's great he proclaimed Jesus is the Christ - that's essential - to follow Jesus is a total life commitment.

These are not suggestions for following Jesus. These are not optional. We're not cafeteria Christians who take or leave what we want. These are Jesus's own non-negotiables for following him. Who you deny, What you take up, and Who you follow.

### 1) Followers are called to deny themselves. **Read 34**

So in the list of terms for unconditional surrender, the first term is that if we want to follow Jesus, we deny ourselves. Later, on we see that part of following Jesus is confessing Jesus - positive association. But here we're focused on denial.

What does it mean to deny ourselves? When you deny something you completely reject any association.

If you were accused of robbing a bank and the cops show up to your door, you would deny ever robbing the bank. Or at least I hope you would deny robbing the bank. "It wasn't me! I have no association with the bank, I wasn't there, I would never do such a thing." You are rejecting any relationship or close association.

That's the idea here except that we deny ourselves. It means we are to act in a completely selfless manner. We no longer have regard for ourselves at all. We no longer seek to make a name for ourselves. We no longer place our will and our agenda in the front.

**Turn to Phil. 2.** Here in **Phil. 2** Paul expounds on this a little more and connects our attitude to Jesus's attitude of self-denial. **Read 1-4**

So believers are to have one thing in common: that none of us do anything out of selfish ambition. We're not trying to get ahead at the expense of others. We don't do anything out of conceit: we're not trying to make a great name for ourselves.

In fact, our goal in life is to count others more significant than ourselves.

And just to get really practical: I want you to think of someone at RBC. Someone who maybe you don't get along with, maybe they rub you the wrong way or you just don't get them or appreciate them or whatever. What Paul is saying is that we are commanded to count everyone - and especially that person - as more significant than yourself.

Your interests, your concerns are now nothing. And you do everything for them out of humility. That's hard, you guys. Why would we do that? We're going to need a big reason. Here's the reason: Because Jesus did that for us. **Read 5-8**

We have this mindset of humility and self-denial because Jesus had the mindset of humility and denial. This is the gospel: Jesus was in the very form of God. What Paul is saying is that before his incarnation Jesus was in heaven enjoying all the joy and glory and all the praise due him as the second person of the Trinity with angels and saints singing his praise in perfect divine comfort.

But he didn't count that glory something to be held onto - or some of you have "grasped." When the Father sent him into the stinking sinful world, born in a cave and laid in a feeding trough Jesus didn't come in kicking and screaming. He *gladly* came into the world. And he didn't set aside his deity - Jesus is and was and always will be God - what he laid aside was the glorious manifestation of his deity.

When he took on flesh his glory was not obvious like it had been in heaven, so people abused him.

He came as a humble, fully human, fully divine servant who died, not for his sins but for others. And who died the most brutal death imaginable: the cross. And he did this for wretched sinners: for me and for you and for all who believe in him.

And here's his reward for that humility. **Read 9-11**

What did Jesus get as a result? Praise and honor and glory. Everyone without exception will one day bow the knee to Jesus and confess his Lordship. Some willingly, some forcibly. But all will bow to Jesus.

But it was his willing humility to count others more than himself. It was his willingness to deny himself and sacrifice himself that brought him that glory. And we are called to that exact same mindset that Jesus had.

**Back in Mark 8** Jesus is not calling us to anything more than what he did. In fact, he's calling us to less than what he did because we're not God and he is. This is nothing less than a complete reorienting of our entire lives to follow Jesus in self-denial.

Before we are saved, everything we do is about us. Our needs, our wants, our desires, our goals, our agenda. What do you want to be when you grow up? Who do you want to marry? Me, me, me. I, I, I.

And yet Jesus says the very first thing about being his disciples is an utter renouncing of ourselves. We're no longer on the throne. We're not even in the picture. "Let him deny himself." "Let him utterly reject himself, completely disassociate from himself."

There is no more glory for me. I'm no longer the center, who's at the center? Jesus is at the center. Now everything I do is about giving Jesus all the glory.

**1 Cor. 6:20:** You are not your own, you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

What does it mean to give Jesus all the glory? We talk a lot about glorifying God. But what does that phrase actually mean?

Doesn't God already have all the glory? Isn't he bright and shiny and awesome and worthy of all praise? Well, yes. If someone were to see God in all his unveiled splendor we would see that he is glorious. The fullness of his attributes bursting forth on display would be amazing to behold. We will see that glory in heaven. But what does that mean down here?

To give someone glory here on earth is to give them credit or praise for what they've done.

The football player who makes the key interception or the baseball player who hits the grand slam at the bottom of the 9th bases loaded down by 3. He gets the glory. He gets the praise and credit. He carried the day, he got the win. So we give him credit and praise for what he's done. We've won the championship because of him.

When we say we're giving God the glory, that's what we're saying. All credit, all honor, now goes to Jesus. He has done it all.

**Rom. 11:36:** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be what? Glory forever! Amen.

Praise forever, honor forever, credit forever. Amen. He's done it all.

We are the slaves, he is the gracious master. We are the body, he is the head. We are the creatures, he is the Creator and because of that our life now fundamentally revolves around him.

Scientists are able to measure the size of distant stars. I don't know how they do this but they do. And there are stars that almost as big as our solar system. A hyper giant star is so big it would easily envelope our sun, and is the size of the orbit of Saturn. It's massive. And it's gravitational pull is massive.

In the cosmic scheme of things, we're like little grains of sand orbiting around a hyper giant star when it comes to us and God. All the weight of glory belongs to God. We add nothing. The Bible says we are but dust. Everything else compared to God is nothing and emptiness **Isaiah 40** says.

To be a follower is to acknowledge that everything revolves around God.

Even our identity is gone. If you want to follow Jesus, who you are no longer matters. Your background, your family, your education, your wealth, ethnicity, nationality, your name, all gone. And now, your identity is completely **in Christ**. You are in him. In Jesus. In Christ.

**Col. 3:3:** you have died and now your life is hidden with Christ in God.

I am not primarily an Upchurch. I am not primarily a husband. I am not primarily a father or a pastor, or gentile or white or American. I am primarily a Christian. A blood bought Son of God.

When early Christians were lined up to be killed for their faith they would often be asked their name and where they were from.

What's your name? Christian. Where are you from? Christian. Why? Because that's all that really matters.

See, the world wants glory for itself. It wants a name, it wants a legacy, it wants to endure. It wants its own version of eternal life. We name buildings and towns and states and even countries after people as an enduring reminder of who they are. The follower of Jesus realizes that all those things will perish.

And the Christian, the follower of Jesus, says fine by me.

See, that's the thing: this isn't a begrudging denial. This isn't the Brady Bunch where it's always "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia." We don't complain that it's always "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus."

No, our heart is to gladly deny ourselves, to gladly be used of God however he sees fit. And to gladly give him all the credit and praise.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to deny ourselves.

2) To be a disciple of Jesus is to take up our cross.

What does it mean to take up our cross? There's a lot of confusion about what it means to take up our cross, or bear our cross, as we follow Jesus.

When most people talk about this what they seem to have in mind is that they've got to put up with some kind of discomfort or difficulty in life even though they're Christian.

"My stubborn husband is just my cross to bear. My poor education or mean boss is my cross to bear. This trick knee is my cross to bear." As though the cross just represents difficulty in life.

Can I tell you something? The cross does not represent difficulty; certainly not difficulty in our lives. The Bible calls those trials.

What does a cross represent? Death. It represents brutal, painful, tortuous, certain death. Intentional execution and destruction of an individual. It is arguably the most brutal torture device ever devised, inflicting hours or days of agonizing pain while it's victim slowly and surely suffocates to death. And not only is it designed as a instrument of execution for the person on the cross, but it is a visible display for all to see. In Roman times crosses would be lined up outside a city along roadsides so that if you traveled from one city to the next you'd watch people condemned to die.

Imagine having to hide your children's eyes from that while heading into Costco or Winco.

Those in Rome who were condemned to crucifixion literally had to pick up their own heavy crosses and drag them to the place of execution. And it wasn't a nice, new shiny cross they just made from nice lumber from Home Depot. They had likely been used hundreds of times covered in the blood and filth - and you know what I mean by that - of the people who had died before.

If you remember, Jesus had to carry his cross to Golgotha where they would lay him on the cross and nail his hands and feet to the wood. He had been so beat up that he couldn't even sustain himself and Simon of Cyrene had to carry it for him. And then he was nailed to it and died.

Wait, Jesus says if you're going to follow him you need to do that? Do what? Be crucified? As in literally? I don't think it's literally, although thousands of Christians have literally been crucified and we should certainly be prepared for whatever death we might face.

Luke's version adds a tidbit that helps us here. **Luke 9:23:** If anyone would follow me let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me."

You can only be physically crucified the one time, then you're dead. But Jesus says this is a daily activity. He's talking about a routine activity. It's an ongoing part of the Christian life.

So what's he saying? He's saying put something to death. What are Christians called to put to death? Our sin. Put our sin to death.

**Col. 3:5:** Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Paul says slay these things. Mortify them. In Galatians, he actually uses the specific word crucify:

**Gal. 5:19-24:** Now the works of the flesh - sin - are [obvious]: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissections, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like this...And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with it's passions and desires.

When Jesus says that following him means taking up our cross, what he means is a cold-blooded determination to absolutely destroy our sin. Slay our sin, crucify our sin.

To seek out and crucify every ungodly thing in us.

See, a lot of people are content to just ignore their sin. Or slowly starve their sin. Or they dabble in their sin. A little here, a little there and they justify it by saying that they've mostly conquered their sin. "I don't look at porn as much as I used to, so I'm good." "I don't gossip as much as I used to, so I'm good." "I don't complain or get drunk as much as I used to...I'm not as lazy as I used to be." "I swear a little, that's better than I used to be."

No, what's Jesus calling us to do to our sin? Brutally nail it to a bloody cross and kill it for all to see.

Usually we call this repentance, turning from sin. And that's true. Believing the gospel is turning from sin. Repentance is a heart change that is evidenced by a change in life.

But here Jesus changes the analogy to killing sin.

Jesus doesn't call us to clean ourselves up mostly. He doesn't call us to slowly quit our sin like we're cutting back on a smoking habit. We don't quit our sin for a little while like we're going on a diet and cutting out carbs for a while.

No. He calls us to wake up every day with the sole determination to execute our sin in the most brutal possible fashion for all the world to see.

And listen, this isn't just a theoretical thing. "Boy I'd really like to stop my sin - hope that happens sometime." No. This is systematic and deliberately planned destruction of sin.

See, rarely does sin just die on its own. A lot of times sin is reduced greatly with only a little effort. Maybe our sins were greatly cut off when we first came to faith. Or maybe you seem to have more victory after a camp or a conference where there's some spiritual push in your life.

But it's not dead, dead.

Maybe we even say "we're struggling with sin" but can I ask: are we **actually** struggling with it? As in striving mightily to put it to death? Or are we just content with where we're at and kind of hope it goes away on its own like a cold?

There's a difference in the struggle when I'm wrestling my kids in the living room and wrestling an armed intruder in the living room. With the kids I'm showing that I have some power but I'm not trying to dominate them. With the intruder it's a fight to the death.

You guys, we need to be fighting to the death the sin that is in us.

And usually to kill it completely you gotta have a plan. You have to actually think it out.

Rather than being lazy, you're going to make a list of things you have to do and just do them. Accomplish them in a certain time.

Rather than being dominated by sexual sin, you're going to confess your sin, get accountability software, and never be alone with your electronics. Whatever you have to do to kill it.

Rather than complain about your husband, you're going to make a plan to thank God throughout the day for your husband, pray for him, encourage him, and not speak any ill of him to anyone else.

Killing sin takes work, determination, drive and usually a plan.

And as you grow older in the faith you should have proverbial notches in your belt of sins that have been killed by the grace of God. There will be some that are tough, some that die hard but you're fighting all the more.

Listen to Jonathan Edwards on sin. These are from his resolutions:

**24.** Resolved, whenever I do any [obviously] evil action, to trace it back, till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it.

When Edwards sinned, he would actually take the time to figure out why. What was the underlying cause - the root - of his sin. And then mount a siege against his own sinful flesh. He would give himself to prayer and specific action to kill it.

**56.** Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

I love that one. He's going to keep hacking away at his sin as hard as he can no matter if he fails. He will not give up the fight, he will fight as hard as he can as long as he must until the sin is dead.

A lot of times we commit to killing sin, we have some success for a while, then we fail and we just give up the fight. It's like we enter the boxing ring and we give our sin some good blows and then it hits us in the tummy and we fold like a lawn chair and give up.

No. Get up, keep going no matter how unsuccessful you are. If you keep striving against your sin you will have progress.

By the way, Jonathan Edwards was just 19 or 20 years old when he wrote most of these resolutions. He took seriously the admonition of Jesus to crucify himself.

Deny yourself, crucify yourself.

3) Followers follow Jesus. This sounds obvious, but Jesus says it so it needs to be said. **Read 34**

This is sort of the opposite of denying ourselves and crucifying ourselves. Those dealt with what we put off or stop doing. Here, Jesus says it positively: follow him.

What does it mean to follow him? He's talking about obedience in every area of our lives. It's not a locational thing. We don't physically follow him around like the disciples did. It means we obey him.

What is obedience? Obedience is instantaneous, complete, joyful compliance.

We follow him instantly. When he called the disciples to follow him, they left everything immediately and followed him. They left their nets and boats and family standing there and literally followed Jesus where ever he went and did what he said right away.

You remember in **Luke 9:57-62** Jesus called people to follow him and they basically said, "Sure, but I need to do some things first." "Wherever we go I need to be comfortable," "I need to wait until my parents die first, then I'll come," "I need to go say farewell to my family."

They made excuses for following Jesus instantly. He said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom." When Jesus calls us to follow him it's a life of immediate service never looking back. It's instantaneous obedience.

It's also complete obedience. It's doing all of what Jesus calls us to do. Not 50% or 70%. It's doing it all.

**Luke 14:25-33** Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and love him more than anyone. And he gives 2 examples of people who only followed him half way: the man who built half a tower, and a king who decides to go to war without realizing the enemy has twice the amount of troops. Those people are fools.

Building half a tower is foolish. Going to war with half the troops you need is foolish. And Jesus says to follow him half-heartedly is what? Foolish. He is the Lord - he wants complete obedience.

And he wants joyful obedience. Jesus doesn't want us to be bummed out about obeying him. You guys working at camp, imagine telling your campers to clean the cabin. And you come back 10 minutes later, it's not done and everyone is groaning or complaining. Never happen, right?

Or you come back 10 minutes later, the cabin is spotless, garbage empty, everyone's excited for the next thing; everyone is excited to comply because they're just happy to be at camp. Which one you want? It's a no brainer

Do you think Jesus wants joyful obedience from us or complaining obedience? Joyful of course. Where do we get that joy? **Read 35**

We get that joy because we get salvation - eternal life with Jesus forever. Whatever small amount of difficulty obeying Jesus is here is nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory and joy that awaits us when we see him face to face.

Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him.

**Pray**