

Jason Upchurch - Mark 8:34-38 - The Good News Requires Eternal Perspective

Alright, we are back in this tremendous section where Jesus has defined what it means to follow him. He sums it up in 3 concise, but very demanding commands.

Deny ourselves: we're no longer at the center of our lives, Jesus is. Our whole lives now revolve around him and we count all people greater than ourselves.

We crucify ourselves: we are dedicated every day to destroying the sin that is in us. We mercilessly seek and destroy sin in our lives with all our might no matter how unsuccessful we might be.

We follow Jesus. Instant, complete, joyful compliance to the Lord. That's what it means to follow Jesus. Despite what anyone says or thinks or wants to believe, Jesus is demanding our whole lives.

So here's the question: why do that? Why follow Jesus with those very high demands?

I mean imagine someone came up to you and said I'm demanding your whole life. You have to follow me, do nothing you want and everything I want. And your whole life now revolves around me.

We'd probably have 2 questions. 1) Who do you think you are? 2) What do I get out of it?

Well, this is Jesus. We already know who he is - he's God in the flesh. Now the question is: what do we get out of it? Why would anyone spend their whole life denying themselves? Why would anyone commit to putting every sin in their life to death? Why would anyone strive to live their whole life according to what Jesus says?

That's actually what Jesus answers for us this morning. Why should someone do all these things?

And Jesus gives us 3 reasons 1) If you try to save you life, you lose it. 2) There's no profit in gaining the whole world and forfeiting our soul. 3) We don't want Jesus to be ashamed of us on the day of judgement.

That's really our outline. And I'll repeat those as we go through this and unpack this section.

But let me make one bigger observation here that I just want to get out of the way. Jesus in this passage is answering the question "why follow him" - but his answers are all negative in tone. He's focusing in on the consequences of not following him.

If you don't follow Jesus you'll lose your life, you'll forfeit your soul, he will be ashamed of you at the judgement. If you don't follow him there are eternal, damning consequences.

Many times we're used to the positive case for following Jesus. We follow Jesus because our sins are forgiven, our guilt is gone, we're sons of God who will experience the eternal glories of heaven, seeing God face to face, the streets of gold, endless pleasure, no tears, no pain or sorrow anymore. Only joy and happiness forever.

And those are good, biblical reasons to follow Jesus. And I think they're especially good reasons because many people seem to make a profession of faith in Jesus just for fire insurance. They just don't want to go to hell. But they're not really excited about Jesus either, they're not really proud of being a follower of Jesus.

But they imagine that it's better to pray the prayer, do some good things, and show up to church than burn forever. Well, they're not wrong. They're just not completely right.

We need to be reminded of the glories of heaven for believers **and** the horror of judgment that awaits those who do not follow the Lord Jesus. Both are true. But both are not always taught from every passage.

So I say all that to say that this morning: Jesus is basically threatening people if they don't follow him. That's what this comes down to.

If you don't follow Jesus the consequences are severe. And the point he's making is that the trade is worth it.

Listen, self denial is hard, crucifying sin is hard, following Jesus is hard. But it's worth it.

This is not a net loss. This is not a bumner deal for us. It's a net, eternal gain. And here, it's a net gain because you avoid judgment.

Let's dive in. Why follow Jesus?

1) Because if you try to save your life, you'll lose it. Read 35

This is reason number one. And also threat number one. The bottom line is that if someone does not follow Jesus they **will** forfeit their life for all eternity.

Now there's a little bit of a play on concepts here, specifically with the word "life." Most everyone has a footnote here telling us that the word in Greek is actually psuche - which means soul. If you want to save your soul you'll lose it, but if you lose your soul for Jesus and the gospel you'll save it.

What does he mean? He's contrasting what we do with our life in this world - the 80 years or so we're alive - versus what happens to us in eternity.

So there are 2 options. Option 1 is you can believe in Jesus and do what Jesus says: deny yourself, crucify yourself, follow Jesus in heartfelt obedience now - that's basically losing your life, losing your soul. Not in a bad way, but you're no longer your own. You're not in control of your life, Jesus is. You give everything up to Jesus.

If you do that - if you lose your life for Jesus and the gospel in these few short years we have on earth - then you will actually save it for all eternity. You won't go to hell, you won't experience the wrath of God, you will experience joy forever. It might be hard here on earth. You might lose friends and family because you follow Jesus.

Paul says that through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God **Acts 14:22**.

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be what? Persecuted. **2 Tim 3:12**

You are promised that if you follow Jesus tribulations await. Can I tell you a little secret that we all know but sometimes forget? Tribulations await unbelievers too. They get sick and have people hate them and go through tough times and die. But following Jesus doesn't exempt us from that. There are tribulations specifically for following Jesus.

But if you follow Jesus even though it's hard, eternity is worth it. That's option 1.

Option 2 is you save your life now. You don't follow Jesus, you don't deny yourself, you don't crucify your sin. You do you. You do your own thing and your life remains your own and you're good with that. In that sense you save your life for now. It's good now. And best case scenario maybe you have a long, wealthy, happy life. Bunch of money, easy life, Sundays all to yourself, no one tells you what to do.

Let's say you decide that path. Wonderful. The only kicker is that you'll spend eternity in hell because of it. You saved your life for these 70 years but you'll lose your life - your soul - for all eternity.

That's the choice. Sacrifice now, for the massive gain later. Or take the winnings now and go to hell.

By the way, we make these decisions all the time. It's called time preference. Do we value a little pleasure now, or a lot of pleasure later?

You've got \$1000 - you could buy a lot of candy bars right now and enjoy them. Or you could put that away in a retirement account and it could grow to a lot more than \$1000. You're giving up candy bars to actually live a much better life later.

Our doctors tell us this. You have 2 options: eat right, get some exercise and be healthy and you'll live a long time. **OR** you can keep eating garbage, never get any exercise and you'll be dead by 50 from a heart attack. What do you want? What's your time preference. Do you value the small pleasure now or the bigger pleasure later?

So that's it. It's either a tough life of following Jesus for an eternity of joy, or it's a 70 years of doing your own thing and then an eternity of hell. What do you want? That's what's on the line.

And that seems like an obvious trade for most of us, but it's not for many people. The pleasures of this life are overwhelming and the reality of heaven and hell seem very far off.

I knew a guy 10 years ago who refused to put anything aside for retirement because he just couldn't fathom not spending money for 40-50 years for something later in life. There was too much life to live now. That's how a lot of people are with eternity.

Now, just one small note before we move on. Jesus says we have to be willing to lose our life for him **and the gospel**. What does that mean? Aren't they the same?

Yes, in a certain respect. But what Jesus is getting at is that salvation is more than just calling yourself a Christian. It's more than just a label. It's a whole way of life. The gospel calls us to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The gospel calls us trust Jesus with absolutely everything. The gospel calls us to shine our light like a lamp on a stand.

Put another way, a lot of people give lip service to Jesus. The gospel is not lip service. It's an entire way of life.

Jesus says in a couple of we can't be ashamed of him or his words - that's the idea. We have to be committed not just to the name of Jesus but to all of what he teaches.

So, why deny yourself? Because if you save your life, you'll lose it.

2) There's no profit in gaining the whole world and forfeiting your soul. **Read 36-37**

So Jesus leads us to the obvious conclusion: it's a bad trade to live your life for yourself now, if in the end you forfeit your life. Or to be super clear: it's a bad trade to reject Jesus and then burn in hell forever.

And Jesus teaches us this with a maximalistic argument. What if you could actually gain the whole entire world? Somehow you controlled it all.

I read a book last year called the *Billion Dollar Whale*. The book is fascinating true crime drama about a guy named Jho Low who basically created a series of scam companies that stole money - a lot of money. And at one time Jho Low was able to amass a liquid fortune of several billion dollars cash. As an individual, he had more access to liquid cash than anyone ever on the planet ever in the history of the world.

Elon Musk is worth \$200 billion, but that's mostly in stock and companies. Not liquid cash. Jho Low had that in cash and he could spend it all by himself in an instant. And Jho Low is still on the run from various countries for his fraud of a few billion.

But imagine somehow you could control the entire world. You're like Joseph in Egypt except no one's over you and you own absolutely everything. You can do anything, no one can stop you. You can go anywhere. You have no enemies. You can live on a super yacht in the Caribbean or palace in the Alps. You have it all. Literally all of it. And you live to be 110. You enjoy this kingdom for 60 or 80 years. Unparalleled luxury.

Jesus says if you had all that, and yet at the end you forfeit your soul you'd be the sucker. You would come out tragically behind. **Read 36**

What does it profit? It's no profit. You lose. Forfeit - that word in the original means "suffer harm" or "punishment" here. It means to sustain injury. Jesus is using a financial term to allude to eternal, conscious punishment in hell. You live your whole life as king of the world doing your own thing - you gained it all here - but end up in hell later; that's a total loss.

You've just consigned your soul to eternal punishment. Eternal damage. It's the worst trade you could ever make.

Can I tell you something? No one will ever gain the whole world. No one will ever do this. So this actually becomes an argument from the greater to the lesser.

If it would be a loss for someone to gain **the whole world** and forfeit their soul, what about the average person? No actually gains the whole world. What about the person who never makes a million dollars and rejects Jesus? Or even a thousand dollars? There's a lot of people around the world who live in much lower conditions than we do and reject Jesus because they want to live their life their way.

Their life is a wreck: financially, relationally, emotionally, all the rest. Not only do they not control the whole world, they don't even control their own life and they reject Jesus.

What a foolish trade. "I just want to sin for my 70 years. I just want to do my own thing for 70 years. I just want money or power or whatever." That's the worst move you could ever make and it's not even close. That's what Jesus says.

And then Jesus does this. **Read 37**

Jesus flips it around. What would you give for your soul? What would you give up so you don't burn forever? So that you don't have to face the atomic wrath of God for all eternity?

You'd give anything, wouldn't you?

I was at camp this week doing a devotion for a cabin about the gospel and we were sitting around a fire pit. I don't know about you guys but whenever I'm around a camp fire I think of hell. That's the picture: burning, sulfur, torment. And I told these campers imagine this fire pit, but the size of Cocolalla Lake - a whole lake filled with fire. That's the description.

Can you imagine having to be burned for even 10 minutes in that? What if someone said: A year from now you'll burn in this for 10 minutes.

You'd be thinking: What can I do to get out of that? What do I have to pay? How do I avoid that 10 minute excruciating experience. I'll pay a million dollars. I serve you forever. I'll do whatever you want.

It's your soul, you guys. It's your life on the line. You'd do everything you can.

What's Jesus say? How do you get out of the punishment? **Read 34**

You follow Jesus. The one who died for sin. The one rose again. The one who reigns on his throne in heaven. He's done it all. Follow me for just a little while. I'll make it worth it for you.

And that's what it really comes down to, isn't it? Is it worth it? It's just a trade. That's all it is. We either believe Jesus and heaven is glorious or we don't. And we either believe hell is real and unbearable and we'd do anything to get out of it or we don't. And we make the simple trade.

3) The third motivation is that we don't want Jesus to be ashamed of us at the judgement. **Read**

So why follow Jesus? Why deny ourselves, crucify our sin and follow Jesus? Because if we don't, when we stand before Jesus in judgement he will be ashamed of us.

Now we need to unpack this a little bit because Jesus makes some very specific points but the gist is still the same: there are basically 2 options. First, he says those who are ashamed of him and his words.

Let's start with ashamed. We use that word, but what does it really mean? What does it mean to be ashamed? What are we getting at? What is shame?

Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress when it appears you've done something wrong.

One time when I was a kid I brought home a bad report card to my dad. And I felt shame. There was a moment of reckoning where my Dad found out that I hadn't done what he thought I had done. And there was dread and guilt and it was emotionally painful to hand him the report card and him find out.

Many other cultures around the world and throughout history are shame-based cultures. If you transgress, the whole society shuns you. Sometimes that seem harsh, but sometimes it's good that people look on sin with great shame.

In our society, depending on the sin, people might applaud your wrong behavior.

Shame can also come if we're associated with someone maybe we shouldn't be. "Oh, you were hanging out with them..." Guilt by association.

Here Jesus says there are people who will view Jesus and his words with shame. To be associated with Jesus is shameful for them. They don't want anything to do with Jesus or Christianity or the Bible because people would look down on them. They would maybe lose their job, lose their friends, wouldn't be cool, whatever.

Or, maybe they say they're a Christian but they want to be a closet Christian because if someone were to find out they were a Christian that would cause them pain and dread and guilt. They don't want to be one of those Jesus Freaks, or a fundamentalist, or whatever. They don't want any public association with Jesus.

Listen, either you own that Jesus is Lord or you don't. Can you imagine an NFL player getting a \$50 million contract with the Seahawks but then being ashamed to wear the jersey? "People might judge me." Yeah, 31 other teams are going to judge you. But you won the lottery, you better wear that jersey with pride.

Listen, God chose you out of the mass of humanity to set his love and affection on you to give you new life, eternal life, adopted as the son of the King through faith in Jesus. What's their to be ashamed of?

And Jesus says not just ashamed of him. But he and his what? Words. Oh here we go.

See, there's another category of people who are ashamed. There are lots of people who call themselves Christians and identify with Jesus publicly. But they are ashamed at his words. They're ashamed of what the Bible teaches.

They're ashamed that marriage is between one man and one woman. They're ashamed of talking about sin and hell.

They're ashamed that boys are boys and girls and girls and you can't change that.

They're ashamed that this ancient book is actually the source of truth and life.

They're ashamed that faith alone in Jesus alone is the only way of salvation.

That's why Jesus says of him and his words. Some people want a Jesus that would never offend anyone with the truth of the Bible. They want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to say they follow Jesus but without any substance. They want a woke Jesus, a gay Jesus, a no-judgment Jesus.

And often it's because if they actually believed everything the Bible says or people found out they did they would be put to shame by the world.

Look at the context though. **Read**

Jesus says ashamed in this adulterous and sinful generation. The generation Jesus was living in was adulterous and wicked. It's not harder to be a Christian now than it was back then. The world has always been adulterous and wicked.

In fact, although we see sinfulness being applauded, it might actually be easier. We live in a nation of almost 400 million people, there are very few Christians who die here because they are Christian. It happened all the time in the Roman world.

There's always the risk people will accuse us or abandon us because the world has always been sinful and adulterous.

Rom 1:16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

I mean, God in Christ rescued us from sin and death and hell and we've won the spiritual, eternal lottery. Why would we be ashamed of that? Some people are because they fear other people more than they fear God. They want the praise of man more than they want the praise of God.

Jesus says "no." If you're going to follow him and your soul is saved for eternity and you've gained riches greater than the whole world you better own it. You better not be ashamed.

Because if you're ashamed of Jesus, Jesus will be ashamed of you. **Read 38**

Now, on the surface what this sounds like is the future coming of Jesus. That's when Jesus comes again, right? I don't think it is. I think it's happening right now in heaven in real time.

When someone is ashamed of Jesus, at the same time Jesus is ashamed of them to the Father. And when someone suffers for Jesus, Jesus honors them before the Father. I think that's happening right now and I'll show you why. **Turn to Dan 7:13-14**

This is Daniel's vision of one like the Son of Man coming on clouds and in power to reign. And he is coming, but not to earth. He's coming to heaven. **Read**

Jesus is referencing this verse here. And the coming he's talking about is not his second coming, but his ascension into heaven. Sitting in glory and power right now watching over his whole kingdom. Knowing right now who is ashamed of him. And right now he speaks to the Father and the holy angels.

"Look at that one! He's willing to follow me to death."

"Look at that one! She's getting made fun of for my name sake. More reward for her, Father!"

"But look at that one. Look at that one! He's ashamed of me. Here I am in all my glory surrounded by billions of mighty angels, I've promised a kingdom and forgiveness and thrones that are eternal and he's frightened because some human threatened him?"

"Yeah, he's not mine."

Have you ever been ashamed of Jesus? I have. There have been times I've denied Jesus either by my actions or my words. And that didn't seal my fate forever. It's not like we mess it up once and we're done.

How many times did Peter deny Jesus? Three.

Listen, if you've denied Jesus or been ashamed of Jesus you know what you do? Repent, ask forgiveness and pray for boldness. And the Lord Jesus who has gone to the Father and is seated on the throne right now will forgive you and give you courage. We lose our life here for just a moment, but we gain it for all eternity. **Pray**