

## **Sermon Reading: Mark 8:27-35**

### **Sermon Theme: Thank You for My Cross**

How many people have received a cross for a gift? I have no statistics to back it up, but Christians seem to like to give crosses as gifts. Maybe it was the white napkin with the little sewn-in cross you received at your baptism. Or it's the decoration you might have in one of the rooms of your house from your wedding or confirmation. It might have been a little gold cross on a necklace from Christmas or it's the one you might wear on your belt buckle. We see and give all different types of crosses. It's not hard to say thank-you for those crosses when it's easy to see them as gifts given out of love. But we don't always feel the same way with the cross that Jesus is speaking about in Mark 8.

Jesus knows very well what others are thinking and saying about him when he asks, **"Who do people say I am?"** What Jesus is doing is setting up his disciples for his next question. **"But what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?"** And Peter does not disappoint. It seems that he is speaking on behalf of the other disciples when he answers, **"You are the Messiah."** Maybe they had talked this over before or they discussed it amongst themselves as they thought about the Old Testament prophecies comparing it to Jesus' work. Whatever it was the Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts to see and confess the truth. The word Messiah means "Anointed One." Someone who was anointed was set apart for a specific job and purpose like kings and priests were anointed to set them apart for their duties. The Messiah who the Jews were looking forward to was the Chosen One of God set apart to come and to save God's people. Peter and the disciples confess and believe Jesus is just that guy. Jesus was *the* Messiah!

But then Jesus warned them to not tell anyone. It wasn't time yet for that to be shared. Instead, it was time for the disciples to learn. Jesus begins to teach them, **"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again"** (v.31). Jesus speaks plainly about these things because he wants his disciples to understand clearly that there was no reading between the lines. This was why the Messiah had come, what needs to happen, and what Jesus wants to happen.

But Peter doesn't like it. Fired up and probably feeling pretty good about himself with the confession he just made, he takes it upon himself to set Jesus straight. As a parent takes aside their child to scold them, so Peter does with Jesus. He doesn't want to embarrass Jesus; but in Peter's mind he can't let Jesus think this way. What Jesus is saying is the opposite of what the Messiah is supposed to be doing, at least for Peter.

But Jesus recognizes what his happening, the danger this type of thinking would have with his disciples, and the very real temptation that it was. In the place of what should have been his friend and supporter Jesus instead sees the Deceiver and Liar. And so he

tells Peter, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** He’s telling Peter, and anyone who supported his way of thinking, “You are not my friend; you are not helping anything. You are God’s enemy. Get out of my way.” What a slap to the face. They probably thought they were doing Jesus a favor. But in reality Jesus says, **“You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”** We see this time and again in the Gospels where the disciples’ minds are on their position and status in this world. They wanted the Messiah to bring them glory and the acceptance of the people right then and there. They wanted the power, prestige, and lack of struggle that should come with it while on earth. But what they were doing was trying to remove the cross from the Messiah, Jesus, and getting in the way of God carrying out his plan.

Poor Peter, one moment he has this great confession of faith and getting praised by Jesus for his good work. The next he is called Satan and enemy of God. You have an idea of what that’s like. One moment you might feel like a really good Christian: you did the right thing, you said the right words, you served well and loved greatly. But then you come crashing down into sin the next day, later on in the afternoon, sometimes it’s mere minutes—even seconds—later that leaves you and others wondering, “How could I, a Christian, do something like that?” We know what it’s like for Peter and the disciples to get caught up with human things. We don’t confront sin, because we don’t want to hurt our relationships and add more tension. We hold back from sharing God’s Law, because we don’t want them to feel bad. We know what God would want us to do, but don’t because of what others might think and how it’s going to affect your reputation. We build riches on earth while taking away time, money, and energy from building up riches first with God. Our Peter-like nature clings to these “things of man” in seeking status in acceptance and praise from others, in never-satisfied craving for ease and comfort, in exalting the passing pleasures of this world to center-of-life status.

So how does Jesus right our way thinking? How does he help move our concerns away from the “the things of man” to the concerns of God?

First, he takes us to his cross. The Son of man did not come to win a popularity contest. He did not come to show you how to live a better life and be a better person. He didn’t come to fix the social problems of his day or become king to rule for a period of time. No, the Son of Man, Jesus, came to suffer, be rejected, killed, and to rise again on the third day. It is a short word in the original language—only three letters long—but it packs a punch. It’s translated, “It is necessary” or here in our reading from NIV2011 “must.” It was necessary, the Son of Man must be rejected by the ones who should have accepted him. His message, his work was not what they expected or wanted. He wasn’t the Messiah they were looking or hoping for; therefore, they turned their backs on him and rejected him. But Jesus didn’t turn his back on them. When we have our minds on merely human concerns, when we reject Jesus and follow our own will, Jesus does not

turn his back on us. Instead he went to the cross and from that cross he prayed for them and us, “**Father, forgive them.**” It was necessary for Jesus to suffer much, for we sin much and every sin that has been committed or would be committed was poured on him. He was completely rejected by his heavenly Father and suffered for those sins so that you would not be treated as your sins deserve. It was necessary for him to be handed over, so that we would be set free from sin and Satan. It was necessary for him to die because death and blood was the only payment accepted to give you life. It was necessary for him to rise from the grave so that you and I would be reassured and guaranteed that when we die, we too will rise to live forever with him. It was necessary for him to do these things and he Jesus willing did it.

With this as your foundation Jesus explains that we too must take up our crosses. In v.34 he says, “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.**” Becoming a Christian costs you nothing; Jesus did it all for you and sends his Spirit to make you a new creation. Living as a disciple, following Jesus, costs you everything. Following Jesus is saying “no” to self and taking up your cross. The cross that Jesus is talking about is anything that you suffer in consequence of your faith in Jesus. What first might come to mind is that this means outward persecution: life and livelihood are threatened, ridicule, being made fun of, picked on, questioned, and the weird looks because of your faith in Jesus. But the cross that is even more common for the Christian is the internal struggle to deny themselves: saying “no” to me, my sinful nature, my reason, putting aside those human concerns, and having a mind for the concerns of God.

For example, there’s the heavy cross of resisting the temptation of that pet sin that no matter how often you fight it off, it keeps coming back. There’s the cross of indifference to sin where sometimes it’s a struggle to actually care when sin is committed. There’s struggle against laziness, not just talking about a laziness to work a job, but being a lazy Christian: not following God’s will, not growing in his Word, living in the mentality of “Jesus loves this I know, and that’s all I need to know.” There’s the cross with a temptation of pride and self-righteousness. There’s the cross and temptation to despair when you consider the sins of your past. There are many different crosses that Christians bear.

The problem with Christianity today isn’t that we aren’t having our lives threatened with persecution. The problem is the unwillingness to carry the cross. The struggle against sin and temptation, the strain on you and your relationships, the discomfort, annoyance, wears you down and gets old after a while. To put it mildly, as we suffer and stumble and struggle with the cross it is hard—if not seemingly impossible some days—to see it as a blessing. One may start to wonder if it’s worth the determination, the fight, the trouble and heartache right now.

But Jesus plainly states it: carrying a cross is a necessary part of being a Christian. Being a Christian is not just a name. It's not just how one identifies themselves. Christians carry crosses; not just the necklace or decoration on the wall, or posting a cute religious-sounding phrase or picture online. It's the cross of self-denial; saying "no" to the temporary ease and comfort that this world and our own sinful nature offers. The thing is that that giving up and leaving those crosses would make life easier right now and maybe for some time even, but Jesus says, **"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it."**

Jesus isn't saying you have to fake happiness or that we can't have nice things, your life has to be miserable, and you must live in poverty. We don't have to go out and look for more ways to suffer. Saying, "No" to self that "Just wants to because I can", denying self is always hard and suffering. A Christian carries a cross not because by that action it saves them, but because that cross leads us to despair of ourselves, to see our weaknesses, to feel that heavy weight, and to lift our eyes to the Messiah's cross. The struggle is hard, but it is good because it shows you something is wrong and it teaches you to rely on the Messiah. It teaches me to be thankful that I'm not saved because of my decision making or good works that I have done. Seeing my struggle against temptation and sin, carrying my cross, seeing how often I stumble and fall, shows how lost I would be on my own.

At the same time that cross also teaches me how unfathomable, undeserving, and incredible Jesus' love is that he would take up his own cross to die for a sinner like me. He is the Messiah, Son of God and Son of Man who was Anointed and chosen by God sent to save his people from their sin. And because he completed the work that was necessary for him to do, he gives you forgiveness of sins and then helps you with your cross. Jesus comes to you in his Word to strengthen you as you lift the weight of your cross and carry it. He invites you to the Lord's Supper to receive his body and blood shed for you on his cross for forgiveness for when you have dropped your cross and fallen into sin. With his Word and Sacrament he encourages and assures you of his continued love. In Jesus' name I pray that we continue to learn how Jesus' cross moves us to want to be willing and thankful for our personal crosses we carry as followers of the Messiah, Jesus. Amen.