

## Cost Analysis: What It Means to Follow the Messiah

Mark 8 27-38

Jesus and his disciples are visiting the surrounding villages around Caesarea Philippi. And as they are walking a crowd has gathered and began following them as well...which is nothing unusual. And it is while on this walk to Caesarea that Jesus asks his disciples a simple question: “*Who do people say that I am?*” And while they toss out some names that they’ve heard what sticks out is Peter’s answer. Peter says, “*You are the Messiah.*” And it is after this that Peter is not only praised for listening to the Holy Spirit, but Jesus takes this moment to teach them, literally, about what this means. And this is the first time we find in the gospel of Mark that Jesus is doing this – explaining what the “Messiah” means...so as we read this text you almost have to put yourself in their shoes...hearing about what Jesus is going to say for the first time.

This moment is all about Jesus teaching what this “Messiah” means. And what I find interesting is that this teaching, this breaking down of what “messiah” means is really everything they did *not* want to hear nor believe. Christ is here pouring out his heart, telling them his fate...his future...WHY he must do it - why he must die – and they want nothing to do with *that* future. It’s not that it’s too hard for them, because Jesus gets into that shortly...it’s purely the fact that this is not what they had envisioned for what and who the Messiah is. It’s not what *they* had planned. And this makes sense when we understand the book of Mark, the author, his goal or his emphasis on who Christ is and was. Christ, to Mark, was the living and breathing servant. And not simply a servant but a “suffering” servant.

So Mark draws out the tension here between Christ and his followers. It’s Christ saying one thing...his people not liking it and saying something else. Christ saying that he is going to die and even TEACHING them about it...and his people, his followers, wanting nothing to do with it. Even to the point of calling out Jesus and essentially telling him he’s nuts! Because that’s what Peter pretty much does here. He pulls Jesus aside and pretty much begins telling hey, “*Hey...we need to get you a visor or something because I think you’ve been out in the sun too long...maybe a little dehydrated because you obviously are not thinking straight! And you need to stop it! Now!*”

That’s essentially what a rebuke is. It’s a harsh correcting of someone. To chastise someone for their wrong-doing. But honestly, even my words are not harsh enough to match up what Peter is doing here. The tension in this text is absolutely amazing! And it only gets more dramatic because now...Jesus lets it all lose! Jesus looks around at his disciples...his band of merry-men and cuts lose into Peter. “*Get behind me, Satan! You do NOT have in mind the concerns...the desires, of God – you only think about what you know and see.*”

Have you ever been around a friend, when growing up, who did something really really bad and their parents caught them and right there, in front of you and all their friends...they got disciplined? It's so awkward and embarrassing at the same time. Can you imagine how the rest of the disciples would have reacted at this time? Oh man...

For Peter to rebuke Jesus and say, "*Jesus....shame on you for saying those things!*" is to blatantly say that they know more than God. That there is something wrong with God's thinking in this matter. But the big issue is that these actions...this statement by Peter tells God that they don't have faith in Him. They don't trust him. They don't believe what he says...and that you, essentially, can change the outcome. And ultimately – they simply do not see and understand the true nature of Christ as Messiah – Christ as the suffering servant.

And I find it interesting that Peter declares who Christ is, and is praised for this knowledge – praised for not going along with what other people say and feel...but really listening with his heart. And he gets it right – and yet completely gets it wrong next. There's an idea, a notion, a feeling of who Christ is and yet that thought, those ideas...are simply corrupt. Jesus simply cannot die, cannot suffer, cannot be rejected by elders and the chief priests and the teachers of the law because that doesn't fit with the messiah narrative that Peter knew, grew up with, and held firmly to. The way of the cross? The way of suffering? The way of denying self to follow Christ? Losing your life so you can gain it? No...that's not the Messiah I believe in.

Peter...there's a *cost* to having Christ as the redeemer. There's a *cost* to this word "Messiah" that may have not been known but must be fully known now. Again, that "cost" wasn't part of Peter's vocabulary.

I think you and I fully understand the "cost" scenario for Christ...but how often we think about that "cost" jumping from Christ to his followers. Or maybe that's an easy conversation for you – but what about the fact that that cost...is still in play today. That when Christ speaks of there being a cost to him and his disciples that still means there's a cost for his followers today?

But that's what Jesus goes on to say, isn't it? Verse 34 says that, "*Whoever wants to be Christ's disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him.*" And let's be clear...he just said that his path was going to go through rejection and then ultimately death. So following Jesus means that we too could be rejected and persecuted. That our path leads to death as well.

I don't know about you, but when I filled out my Christian registration card I don't remember checking *that* box as something I'd like to participate in. Where was that part of the interview process? If it were up to me, I would rather go down the path *opposite* the heavy cross-burden-rejection and death path...I want to go down the path of praise and pats-on-the-back from people path – maybe some hugs. The path that is lined with congratulatory voices and no heavy burdens

or crosses. The path that is lined with positive people praising my movement towards glory. A path that is straight, narrow...no hills...no rocky terrain...maybe some balloons or something for decoration.

I thought this being a “Christian” stuff was supposed to be easy. We believe that God took all that hard stuff away, right? We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts us into making the right decisions – the healthy and holy ones. Aren’t I saved? Aren’t I redeemed? What’s up with this burden-cost thing Jesus speaks of?

But that’s just it – there HAS to be a cost to us. Not only because our world is corrupt and we are corrupt, not only because the things of this world are in stark contrast to the things of heaven – but ultimately it costs us something because it cost Jesus something. And if Christ came to earth and became fully human –lived the very life we live and experienced the very things we experience and had to choose and give up the very things WE must give up then that’s our fate as well.

I guarantee you that if Jesus said, “things are going to be cake for you...welcome to easy-street!” the disciples wouldn’t have acted the way they did. And I guarantee you that if Jesus always gave me the “easy” route than I sure would be willing to follow that route more often than my own and without hesitation or any cost-analysis that I do! *Oh...this is the easy way? Full of escalators, scotcheroos, and puppies? Awesome! Sign me up... I’ll see you at the top!”*

But it doesn’t work that way. There’s a cost. There’s a cost for having your life redeemed, saved, restored. Which means we have to ask the question. We have to chew on the words, the CONVICTING words of Christ. So let’s me ask the very question: **What does it mean to be a “follower” of Jesus?** Because ultimately that’s what this is all about, isn’t it? The struggles we see the disciples having, the struggles we have in our own lives...this discussion of “cost” and a personal evaluation of what that means.

So what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Does it mean that we hear his words and agree with them... for the most part? Does it mean that we read Scripture and say, “*Yeah...that’s pretty good stuff and I will follow it when it fits me.*” or “*Nah, that piece of Scripture that’s for the person sitting next to me at church.*” Does it mean that we pick and choose what to believe and what to follow – or even doing what the Disciples do and call Jesus “Savior” and “Lord” but only on our own conditions and our own times when we need it and feel most comfortable doing so?

Because if that’s what it means...then we’re in for one huge surprise – and it’s not a good surprise!

To be a follower of Jesus means we FOLLOW Jesus. It means we take his words as *more* than a grain of salt. It means we follow his lead and his example which means that we WILL HAVE TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS – whatever that looks like and whenever that happens. And yes, it is rough...and it can be tough. Nothing about “taking up your cross” sounds pleasant and happy. Nobody ever pictures a nice Styrofoam cross. Right? A real cross is heavy. It’s awkward. It’s cumbersome. It’s painful. It’s challenging and forces us into a posture of humility. But we take the cross because we trust Him – we believe in Him – we know his ways are higher than our ways. Which means his ways are right and true while our ways are faulty and corrupt.

And let me add that “taking up our cross” is something we choose – not something we’re born with or a condition we have. Right – we all understand that – right? That to take up one’s cross means that you willingly choose to take on that burden for Christ and for others.

The way of the cross, the way of Christ is one that says the ways of this world are not *my* ways. Our world today says that money, power, prestige, and honor and respect are things we strive for. Christ says my ways, my kingdom, is based off of humility, love, turning the other cheek, serving others first, offering up your life in place of others. My disciples, my followers will love (**1 John 3:16**); my followers will be me wherever they go and if that takes you to the darkest and dirtiest places where nobody in their right mind would go...then you go because there is someone there who needs the love of God.

The proper response from Peter – the proper response each and every day for you and I is simply, “OK God. I will go, I will love, I will sacrifice, I will do your will.”

One author states, “*Jesus’ submission to God’s will is the proper response to God’s claims over self’s claims.*” And our response must be similar. That in whatever God decides to put in our path our proper response is going to be: “OK...let’s go. I trust you.” OR “Oh, it’s time for me to carry this cross for a while? I’m ready.”

Because a Christian fully understands that God is Lord of their life. So we take up the cross in obedience and trust. Because when we do that, when we respond that way, we not only say “yes” but we are saying that his will is above ours and we will follow him. We faithfully will obey. Again, what exactly that cross, that burden, looks like... I don’t know. And when it happens – we aren’t sure either because it just happens. I imagine something clicks in your head and the Spirit moves you. But what we do know is that it will come and when it does Christ says, “*my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (**Matthew 11:30**) as well as, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*” (**Heb 13:5**)

And I think we must keep things in perspective. It DID cost God something too...it cost him His Son. That God had to watch his Son die a horrible death. God knew that he would be rejected,

crucified, killed...martyred. It cost God, it cost Christ his life. And he knew that from the beginning too! Knowing what would come he still said, *“OK...this is the cross I will bear. This is the work I must do. This is the path I must take – for your sake. I will exchange my life – for yours so that in my death you could have life.”*

Following Christ costs us something – but the question is if it’s worth it. And just think about the other way – the opposite direction. That way might not mean that you have to carry your cross – but it does ultimately mean death. The way of the cross is the way of life, the way of hope, the way of peace, the way of the Messiah – the way that is burdensome now...but freeing just on the other side.

Is Christ worth it? He said you were...and he didn’t even do a cost-analysis or try to renegotiate your life for his. He simply went. He didn’t fight it, he didn’t hide from it...he actually took it head on, entered into the fire and never looked back.

Let’s pray