

OUR GREATEST INVESTMENT! (Mk. 8:34-38)

Mk. 8:34 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Everyone wants the best out of life, and rightfully so because you only live it once ... and that was at the core of what Jesus was saying on this occasion, which was also recorded by Matthew (16:24-27) and by Luke (9:23-26). ... This is Gospel preaching at its best for this is how Jesus preached it. He invited sinners to come to Him for forgiveness and to receive eternal life, and requiring of them three aspects, - self-denial, taking up a cross, and obedience in following after Him.

Unsurprisingly, that is not what the people were after! Instead, they favoured a religion which was self-centred and self-advancing ... but definitely not self-denial! ... Normally, they wanted to hear how good they were and they wanted to listen to a rabbi in the synagogue inflating their egos ... but Jesus was not doing that ... not because He was being awkward or in any way malicious ... but He was telling them how it truly was because He loved them. That is why Luke tells us when Jesus came near to Jerusalem, **Lk. 19:41** ... he beheld the city, and wept over it, 42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. 43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, 44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. ... He loved them, and He could see the *mess* they were in.

And not surprisingly there was *urgency* in the voice of Jesus as He preached to the crowds. He knew what was ahead of them ... they didn't, but He did ... and that is why His preaching was filled with necessity. Many of the people to whom He was speaking would be alive when the Roman General Titus would enter Jerusalem in 70 AD and ransack the city, whose armies would rape their wives, slash their children in pieces ... These people were heading towards destruction, and they had absolutely no comprehension of it.

But even greater than what the Roman General Titus would bring upon the land would be the judgment of God. These people of Israel, - with such a long and blessed legacy, - to whom, - above all the nations of the earth, - God had

sent His Son were rejecting their opportunity to believe in Him. They did not want to know Jesus as their Redeemer ... choosing instead an empty and vain religion that suited their lifestyle.

On the other hand, it would have made perfect sense to follow Him because they had witnessed His miracles, and listened to the teachings He had given ... and everything He said and did was flawless ... but still they would not receive Him as Saviour, Messiah, and Lord, **Jn. 1:11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ... Isaiah's prophecy had come true, **Is. 53:2** when we shall see him, there is no beauty [*attraction*] that we should desire him.

Yes, granted, some of them were willing to follow Him, but only at first and only on their own terms, for example, **Lk. 9:57** a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. **58** And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. **59** And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. **60** Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. **61** And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. **62** And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Jesus, I'll follow You ... but there are a few things I need to see to first ... and it has the implication, Jesus, You have to wait! ... No, said Jesus, that's not the way it works, **Mt. 6:33** But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ... There is to be no hankering over the past ... and no dithering! You have to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, or else you might as well not bother!

Jesus does not take second place. In Heaven He has always had first place because He is the eternal King of kings, and Lord of lords. The angels do His every bidding ... and even, there is coming a day when all the greatest and the richest and the most powerful will bow before Him. ... And so He is not prepared to *do* second place under any circumstances for He is either received as Lord of all, or He simply will not be Lord at all.

It is not confusing ... He is not an 'add-on'. If you want to be a Christian, it is not about 'including' Jesus in your life, but it is about Him taking possession.

Now, that does not mean you become a weirdo, or go and live in a commune! It does not mean you divorce yourself from the world ... but what it *does* mean is that Jesus Christ goes with you wherever you go ... and you have no desire to go anywhere you cannot take Him. And it is the same with conversations and behaviour, - if it does not suit His company, it should not suit us either!

In Christ a change takes place and we become a new creation ... but if there is no change, it can hardly be said there has been any conversion! There is no point claiming to be a Christian if there is no evidence ... What is the evidence? ... Well, Jesus explains it here, **Mk. 8:34** *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ... Those are the requirements!*

Let's turn to Lk. 13 and notice the question the disciples asked Jesus, **23** Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, **24** Strive [*ἀγωνίζομαι*] to enter in at the strait gate [*cf. Jn. 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved*]: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. ... They will simply not be able for it is impossible to enter through the gate of salvation by your own efforts, - it cannot be done. ... It's like those who think all they have to say to Jesus on Judgment Day is "Let us in", and He will ... *but He won't* for He has already addressed this issue, **Mt. 7:22** *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23* And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity

The gate is so narrow that 'overweight' people won't fit in through the narrowness of the entrance ... not with all the extra burdensome 'flesh' of their good works and self-righteousness.

And what Jesus is saying in Mk. 8:34 is that it *costs* to be a Christian because you have to give up what you think is necessary towards your salvation and trust only in what He has done for you in sending His Son to die for you on the cross. You have got to admit and to realise there is nothing good in you to merit His saving grace. He tells us our righteousness is no better than filthy rags (Is. 64:6) ... and it is only the righteousness He imputes within us that produces what He requires.

And sometimes the righteousness He grants us to become Christians costs us, - it might cost us some of our friends ... it sometimes costs our lifestyle ... and in some parts of the world, it even sometimes costs lives!

Just shortly before Jesus spoke to these people Peter had declared, [Mk. 8:29 Thou art the Christ](#). ... That is one of the most important statements in the Gospels, if not in the whole of Scripture! And then Jesus stunned them by telling them He was going to suffer and die, and be raised from the dead. But, the suffering and the dying did not fit in with their concept of what should happen to the Messiah so Peter told the Lord so! ... To which Jesus replied by rebuking Peter, saying, [Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men \(v.33\)](#).

Peter could not see any place for a suffering Saviour ... none whatsoever. Instead, he saw following Jesus to be a highway to his own glory, - Jesus raising an army of Jews and defeating the Roman Gentiles, chasing them out of the country and setting up His Kingdom ... and he wanted one of the top seats, sitting beside Jesus! He had no comprehension of Jesus dying on a cross ... and so that is why even *he* had also to listen to this message of the Saviour, [Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me](#). ... The 'whosoever' was as much for the disciples as it was for the rest of the people!

It doesn't matter where you come from, it doesn't matter how much you have or how much you haven't, it doesn't matter how much you know or how much you don't ... There is only one Gospel, and it has the same criteria for all ... [let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me](#) ... God requires self-denial, and if you are not willing to accept His terms, - you'll not enter the Kingdom! Those are the conditions ... for if there is no cross, there is no Sacrifice, ... and if there is no Sacrifice, there is no salvation, ... and if there is no salvation, there is no Saviour!

... I 'move over' and let Jesus 'take over'. It is Christ 'moving into the driving-seat' of my life. ... You freely hand over to Him. You read His Word, you learn from His Word, and you set out to follow its teachings.

So, that is self-denial ... What does it mean, then, to take up your cross? ... Jesus had not yet told His disciples He was going to be crucified, - He had told them He was going to suffer and die, but He had not told them how for He had

not specifically mentioned the cross ... So, what would they have been thinking when they heard Him say, *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross?*

To take Him literally, they would have envisaged the awful death by crucifixion ... the kind of death the worst of criminals suffered, and often rightly. Also, something like 30,000 Jews had been crucified by the Romans and others in their land during the period of our Lord's life. It was, therefore, a fairly familiar sight.

What Jesus was actually asking, though, was ... how valuable is this gift of salvation I am freely offering you? Is it so valuable that you would put it above the cost of your life? Is it so valuable to *you* that *you* would withhold giving it to *Me*? ... If I asked you to, would you give up everything for Me?!

Now, all but one of the disciples (John) was martyred for their faith ... so they did give up all for the Saviour. Not every believer who comes to Christ, of course, will lose their life for the faith ... but, even as I study for this message I received the weekly news email from *Barnabas Fund* telling about how in Pakistan a 17-year old was picked out and raped at a Muslim festival because she is a Christian, and at least nine Christians were killed by guns and machetes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and two more pastor's wives murdered in the country's capital, and in Egypt houses in Christian villages were burned and Christians murdered, and more Christians being persecuted, raped and slaughtered in Libya ... and so it goes on and on. ... We most probably will never have to go through such terrible persecution in our lifetime, but if we did, would we? Does our faith mean *that* much to us? ...

So, becoming a Christian has serious ramifications for Jesus says we have to deny ourselves and put Him first ... every time ... and we have to be ready to take up our cross, when it might leave us out of favour. And then He said, *Whosoever will come after me, let him ... follow me.* ... That is the proof of being a Christian, - you follow Jesus ... and you *continue* to follow Him! You don't 'pick Him up and set Him down' when 'the fancy takes you' ... but you keep on following Him *all the time!*

It is very demanding for it requires nothing less than your best ... that is what Jesus is saying. It is not like ... "Here, put your name down and join us, and that's it!" No, it is not like that for being a Christian means being a follower of

Jesus for the rest of your life. True conversion, Jesus says, is like when you take up the plough and you don't finish until all the work is completed. ... And something else too ... the work is not a burden, but it is a blessing for you realise the privilege of being in the Master's service. ... He is the priority in your life, and you love His Gospel and what God has done for you in the plan of salvation, and you are looking for that blessed hope of eternity with Him.

You see, being a Christian is altogether rewarding, but it is not for the faint-hearted. It is not for everybody because it is for the brave and the strong-willed, for that is what the Holy Spirit makes us into. ... God will always give you the grace to contend with whatever difficulties come along your path for He knows all about the sufferings and the pains, - He had more of them than we could ever imagine! He went to the cross for us, so there is nothing He could require from us which is greater than that ... And He did not go to the cross empty-handed for He bore on His own body *all* our sins.

Consider that ... When a believer dies, he/she dies, - as it were, - in the arms of God ... Tell me, where were the arms of the Father when His Son died ... His Son cried in agony, *why hast Thou forsaken Me?* ... *That* was the heaviest of *all* burdens to bear! ... Left alone on the cross, even by His Father! ... The Father had to turn away His face from His Son on the cross because of the sin that had been placed upon Jesus, - "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood".

Consequently, our Saviour knows all about the cross, - more than we shall ever know, - so He would not ask of us anything He was not prepared to face Himself, and He backed up what He is saying with ... ³⁵ *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.* ... Of course, you can save your life temporarily and yet lose it eternally, and so Jesus followed up His statement by asking directly into the souls of those who were there, ³⁶ *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

... The world or Jesus, - that is the choice. Do you want the things which someday you will have to leave behind ... or do you want the Lord Jesus Christ Who will never leave you ... and He will come when this life is over and He will take you to His home?

Which is better? ... It is a 'no-brainer', as we say, ³⁷ Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ... When the farmer had enjoyed a great harvest, and filled his barns to overflowing, he was so pleased with himself, and he sat back and decided I'm going to 'blow it all' on me ... And God summed up his life, **Lk. 12:20** Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? ²¹ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

There is no price could be placed upon your soul, - it is incalculable. ... Only Christ saw the cost, and He left Heaven and all its glories to ransom the souls of His people, for He **Phil. 2:7** made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ... He did that for *you*, that you would know Him as your Saviour.

He paid the infinite price to redeem it so, therefore, He can rightly require of you, to deny yourself, - take self of the throne, - take up His cross... whatever that may be ... and follow Him. ... And then He draws it to the conclusion, ³⁸ Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

He told them judgment is coming ... so, whose side are you going to be on? He said, if you are ashamed of Me, I'm going to be ashamed of you. ... I shall leave you to the choice you made ... and I'll not look at you because you chose your sin over Me, - you turned away and you decided not to look to me and be saved. ... In other words, if I do not trust in Jesus that He suffered the punishment of my sins at Calvary, then *I* will have to bear the punishment for my own sins forever.

Our greatest investment ... how valuable do you consider your own soul? ...

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling ...

... All for sin could not atone;

Thou must save, and Thou alone.