

UNEDITED DRAFT
How will you lose your life?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I will begin today by suggesting to you that many Christians today don't really understand what it means to be a Christian, or what God requires to be a Christian. Many think that being a Christian means having your name on a membership roster of some Christian church. Some think being a Christian simply means that you call yourself a Christian. Some think it means going to church... or at least having the intention to go to church. Maybe you only actually get there at Christmas and Easter, but you intend to go more often, so that counts, right?

So Jesus is going to clear this all up for us today, but he clears it up by really making us think through a paradox that he presents... a paradox that goes to the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. As we will see in our reading today, Jesus tells us that if we save our life, we will lose it. And if we lose our life we will save it. So did you see there what I saw? Not matter what happens, you WILL lose your life. There is no possible scenario in which you will *not* lose your life.

So the question Jesus would have wrestle with today is not: Will you lose your life? Because no matter what, you will lose it. And we'll see what Jesus means by that in a minute. So then the question that remains is simply this: "How will you lose your life?"

You will look at life in an entirely new way if you will grasp this essential truth: God designed human life such that there is no way for you to keep it. No matter what you do, you will lose it. But not just physically speaking. Spiritually speaking as well: you cannot keep your life. You will, you must lose it. The only question is: How will you lose your life?

We are at a high point in Mark's Gospel. Jesus has been preaching, teaching and healing. In the verses just before the ones we are looking at, Peter make a beautiful and accurate confession of who Jesus is. He is the Christ... that promises Messiah. They know he's not just some miracle-working rabbi, but that he is God's unique and special chosen one who would accomplish an eternal mission planned before the world was created.

And then Jesus for the first time directly and clearly tells them what was about to happen.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. [It doesn't get more clear and direct than that, does it? This is exactly how he will finish the work his Father gave him to do. This is how he will save people from their sins. He will take their burden of sin upon himself, he will suffer, be rejected, and be killed. The work of salvation complete, he will rise on the third day. That's it. Nothing hidden. The plan simply and fully revealed.] **He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.** [Peter didn't want anything of this kind of talk. The cross was not part of Peter's plan. Suffering? Death? Peter was looking for an earthly kingdom... and earthly Messiah. He failed to understand the eternal purpose of Jesus' work. He was all about the glory, not about the suffering or cross. And doesn't that describe pretty much everyone on the planet? Don't we work the same way? Who wants the suffering? Tell me that when I follow Jesus there will be health and wealth and

happiness! Tell me Jesus will take away the cancer, and will bring peace and prosperity to our nation... and me. Tell me Jesus will take away my problem and make my life easier! You'll find many Christian churches that will tell you those things... but not this one. Because Jesus never said these things. In fact, look at his reaction to Peter's rebuke: **But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

Peter's desire for Jesus to avoid the cross is an idea that comes straight from hell. Satan did not want Jesus to go to the cross to pay for the sins of the world either.

Now let's take a look at what follows where Jesus clearly describes what it looks like to be Christian.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said... [Do you see how Jesus escalates this quickly? He had been talking to just his disciples. Then Peter rebuked him privately. Jesus then rebuked Peter before all of the disciples. Then Jesus calls in the crowds along with the disciples so everyone could hear this: **"If anyone would [wishes] come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.**

Lest we think that this description of what it means to be a Christian here is exceptional, please know that this way of describing it is found throughout the Gospels. Matthew 16, Luke 9 – Parallel accounts. "Come follow me and die," is the basic theme seen again and again. Not a man-centered invitation. Not, "follow and receive an easy life." But "follow and receive a cross."

Matthew 10:32: Not peace but a sword. Family strife.

Luke 9:57-62: "I will follow you! Bury father. Let me go say goodbye to my family. Jesus says if you have any other agenda or higher priorities, you cannot follow him.

Luke 12:51ff. Household divided. You pay a price relationally when you come to Christ. Ch.13. Many seek to enter and will not be able.

Another place tells us that **the price of eternal life is everything.** Illustrated by the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price.

End of Luke 14... very similar. Count the cost. Christ above all else.

John 12:25: Be ready to hate your own life.

Coming to Jesus not easy. You can't just take the plusses Jesus offers and keep everything else.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would [wishes] come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

This is such an important verse, we're going to have to spend some time on it. Context: Peter identifies him as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This is the high point! However, their understanding of Messiah is still flawed. Earthly and physical. So he clarifies. He will suffer and die, and rise on the third day. Peter speaks for them all and rebukes Peter. "Get behind me Satan." Man is interested only in the glory. But God requires the cross.

From the highest high to the lowest low. Their view of the Messianic kingdom was a Satanic one. Must be suffering in order for there to be glory. There cannot be the one without the other. No room in their theology for the cross.

Then this: If you follow me, there is a cross for you too.

If ANYONE... take up cross (self-denial) and follow.

- 1) **Self-denial.** Deny yourself. What does that mean? This is where you start. To deny means to disown, disassociate with someone... and the someone is *yourself*. Jesus says you must come to a point where you no longer want to associate with the person that you are. That means each comes to be able to say: I realize the sinner I am. I abandon the work-righteous system. I abandon my own agenda, my own plans. "I don't know the man!" is what Peter said of Jesus. But it's what we must honestly say of ourselves! Reject all that you are. Your desires. Your ambitions. Why? They are all wrapped up in yourself. Jesus leads a person to see in himself only sin and ugliness that we would abandon ourselves. This must be if there will be any relationship with God. Nothing I have done could ever be worthy of God. You can't come on any other basis!

EXAMPLES: Paul was full of himself until on the road to Damascus, Jesus himself showed him how sinful he had been. Peter was full of himself until he realized how sinful he was after denying Jesus three times. Pharisee and tax collector... it was the tax collector that recognized his sin.

The whole Bible teaches this. Sermon on the mount: Blessed are... the poor in spirit. Those bankrupt spiritually. Those who are lost. Those who are sinners. In the Psalms we read the same: A broken and a contrite heart, oh Lord, you will not despise." We cannot be a Christian without recognizing our abject poverty before God... you are a penniless beggar. IF you think you come to God with a pocketful of cash or anything of value to him, you will find nothing. When we come to him empty, pockets turned inside out, we find everything.

I can't have... Christ and my desires. Christ and my sin. Christ and my will. Christ and my way. Christ and my righteousness. Can't happen. The more you know about Christ and self the more you grow downward into humility and you increase in the lowering estimation of self.

The essence of following Jesus is self denial, not self improvement. So many people avoid church or stop going to church when they feel most ashamed, most sinful. They figure they'll improve their life a bit, and then start going again. Nothing is more harmful to our spiritual health! In fact, the only people qualified to follow Christ are those who understand just how sinful, shameful, broken, pitiable they really are. My default mentality is to look out for myself, my family, or even my community. While that sounds good and might get me some applause, it's still all about me. But until we despair of self, we cannot find true hope in Jesus.

DENY YOURSELVES. Jesus says. This is not optional. It is essential for following Jesus.

- 2) **Take up his cross.** Luke 14:27. Cannot be my disciple without carrying cross. Meaning? Jesus not yet crucified and they weren't told about the crucifixion. So... cross? Only one thing: death by crucifixion. (30,000 crucified around that time. People saw it. Familiar. Horrific.) Not a pretty, romantic symbol of love. Instrument of torture.

Follow me? Then you are headed toward death. Cross is a metaphor for suffering. There is always suffering along the way when you are a dedicated follower of Jesus. You will endure persecution, rejection, reproach, shame... daily. They treated him with hostility. If you closely associate yourself with him, suffering. No to self. Suffer. Will you give up comfort, relationships, wealth, etc.?

Examples of the suffering it has cost in the lives of believers... Bible and after.

Is it worth it? Absolutely... but only if you have the eternal view.

Christ is so precious, there is NOTHING more valuable or more worthy. Shouldn't we

rejoice to give up everything to receive that day when we will stand before Jesus in heaven and dwell with him forever?

- 3) **Follow me.** Let him be following me (continual.) It means to trust him fully. Rely upon him completely. It means to hang on his every word and to imitate him every way. It means to walk the way he walked ... the way of the cross... the way of suffering. Continue in his word if you are a real disciple. Love one another... like Jesus did. Not just hearers but doers.

The paradox:

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

You can hold on to your life. You can save it temporally. But you will lose it eternally. But when you lose your life for Jesus and the gospel... not giving your life for a noble cause. Not giving your life for the poor. You can die doing GREAT works... but it will not take you to heaven. ONLY a life that is given up for Christ and the gospel results in salvation.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

What would it be like to have won the lottery... to have the whole world? Having stuff is the key to happiness? No! Would that be a good deal? A good exchange? Stupid. What good did it do? Parable of the rich man who built bigger barns. Eat, drink and be merry. Tonight you die. Then what? You profit nothing.

Your soul is worth more than anything and everything on the planet. There is no price for your soul... except the price Jesus paid on the cross. It was a price he paid because that's how much he values your souls!

Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

THE PUNISHMENT. There is a coming judgment:

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he come in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

If you are ashamed of Christ and will not associate with his Word and teaching, and you choose to remain in this wicked generation, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in glory. Jesus focuses us on the eternal result. The divine judgment. Terrifying!

Listen: you will live forever. Where will you spend it? And you will lose your life. But how will you lose it? Will you hold on to your life now only to lose it in eternity? Or will you lose your life now for Jesus and the gospel and in so doing, save it for all eternity.

CONCLUSION: But here's the glorious reality. When you lose your life for Jesus... when by faith your life is lived for him because you know and believe that all you are, all you have, all you will ever be is due to God's work in you through Christ Jesus... then you truly gain LIFE. There's life and there's LIFE. By losing your life you gain LIFE!

Deny yourself, take up your cross. Follow Jesus.