

Mark 8:34-9:1

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- [0 : 0 0] Naturally, what I mentioned to the kids just now about following is actually what we're thinking about this morning. We're thinking about something that's at the very centre of what it means to follow Jesus in our lives.
- What we're thinking about, what it means, about being a Christian means in the day-to-day of life. And the very heart of it all, being a Christian, following Jesus, it's this thing that Jesus talks about to his disciples in the passage, which they were looking at, it means to deny yourself, denying yourself.
- Now, before we look at the Bible reading, I just want to explain what denying yourself of something, it's not exclusively a Christian idea, is it?
- It's true of it, it's actually true to deny yourself in everyday life, especially when you connect that kind of idea with reaching a goal. But I've got a goal at the minute.
- My goal at the minute, and I've had this, it's not a new goal, not this for a long time, is to start a more regular pattern of weekly exercise and to eat less chocolate.
- [1 : 1 1] I've said this before, but chocolate for me, a class that has its own food group. I've had this before, probably at least every other day. An exercise, I don't know about you, but whilst I know I should, like, the exercise is a bit more, like most people, it's finding that motivation to go out for a run after work, once the kids are in bed, just, oh, it just feels like, oh, I'll just get round to it tomorrow.
- The reason I want to get fitter, you know, all the time, just want to be healthier, I want to get fit. However, here's the thing, isn't it?
- If I want to achieve that goal, I'll have to do two things. First, I'll have to deny myself chocolate, which I really want, and in an evening when I just want to sit down and relax, and when the kids are away, I'll have to deny myself that, and either go for a run or, I don't know, do something else, lift some weights, I don't know.
- You and I know, and there's something in my life, but there'll be stuff in your own life where you've had to deny yourself something, that you enjoy, in order to make the game, to reach the goal somewhere else.
- And achieving that goal, it comes at a cost, doesn't it? It comes at a cost to the thing that you have to deny yourself of, there's a cost to it. This is what Jesus is talking about to the crowd and his disciples in what we read earlier.
- [2 : 5 0] He's saying that in order to be a Christian, in order to be a follower of me, in order to be a follower of Jesus, what we know is true in the world, with normal things like, you know, eating less chocolate, whatever it is, if it's true in the world, it is true in a spiritual sense, when it comes to how to live as a Christian.
- That being a follower of Jesus is actually costly, I suppose. And so we're just going to think about what that means for us, and how we live, and how we make decisions, knowing that that's what it means.
- There's three things we're going to look at. We're going to look at denying yourself to follow Jesus, and then we're going to look at a warning that Jesus gives about shame, and then an encouragement he gives about endurance.

So, before we get there, I just want to have a quick reminder about what Jesus has been saying over the last few weeks as we've looked at this part of Mark.

This whole section, chapters 5 to 8, is all about disciples, how the disciples should live, and how Christians should live, and how... Last week, you might remember, if you heard it, that it was all about the disciples realising Jesus' identity, that he is the Christ, that he's the king, but that he's the suffering king.

[4 : 17] He's the suffering Christ, which is what they didn't want to know, which is why Peter rebuked him. And here we get to it, after Jesus has said, no, no, no, I must die, and I must be treated, hopefully, in order to rise again.

Then it then comes down to, that's what their lives are going to be like too. So the first point, deny yourself to follow Jesus. When we hear, I don't know what you think of when you hear the word disciple.

My, I guess that you probably think of Jesus' 12 courses friends. But actually, it's just another word that describes what a Christian is. What a follower of Jesus is.

It's just a word that means somebody who is, who follows Jesus. Just look with me, what Jesus, after he calls, he calls not only the disciples, but look with me, he calls also the crowd to him.

Look what he says to them in verse 34. Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

[5 : 25] If you, if you want to be a follower of Jesus, a Christian, if you want to be a disciple, to come after him, to follow him, what it means is that this is what you must do.

It means that the life of a Christian must map onto the life of Jesus. We understand the idea of denial from what I said earlier about chocolate. However, what Jesus says is actually slightly different.

Because he's not actually talking about denying yourself a possession or a thing or a peer. what Jesus says to do is actually much harder. Because he's talking about denying your very self who you are, the values you have and the things that you hold dear.

He's talking about denying the things that we've built our life around that dictate how we make decisions or perhaps even our ambitions. That can be, as I say that, I know that sounds quite abstract.

So let me give you a few examples. I'm not saying what you'll notice as I say that is I'm not saying some of these things that I mention as examples, none of them are bad things.

[6 : 36] Most things actually are good things. Take, we all might want our kids to be happy. Right? But if our children's happiness is the most important thing, there will come a time when you have to choose between their temporary happiness and doing what Jesus says.

Perhaps you might fear them missing out on something. You might fear them blaming you and church or even your faith for their unhappiness. But denying yourself would mean allowing them to be temporarily unhappy.

Now, that might seem, on a scale of things, that might seem small, but I know, I've experienced that in moments that is really hard. But that's when it means.

Let me give you another example. What about your reputation? We all want a good reputation with others. Who doesn't want that? But if a positive reputation is, again, what people think of you, is the most important thing in your life, it will govern the decisions you make and it will matter when people think less of you.

You'll be tempted to hide that you're a Christian. Maybe not be upfront about it because of what other people might think and say, perhaps there will be a fear of losing a friendship. Denying yourself would mean being upfront about your faith and possibly somebody not thinking as well of you.

[8 : 04] You might even lose a friendship because of that. The final example I'm going to give is having ambitions for your career. That's a good thing. It's good to have ambitions for your career.

It's good to make money, to make more money, to provide for your family. That's a good thing. But if money is the most important thing, perhaps you might start working too many hours and miss out on time with your family.

You might worry that being known as a Christian might hamper your chances of getting a promotion and so, again, hide your faith. You may even go along with maybe someone else who's more deceitful.

You may go along with their plans in order to stay in their good books so that it doesn't hamper your progression at work. I've just given a few examples, but I'm sure you can work the, if it's not those three, any of those three years, you can think of the thing that you would, what's the thing in your life that you would, that if you were to lose it, causes you distress because of what it would mean?

That is the thing that you almost have to, that you always have to think, is this, why is this the most important thing in my life? what would it mean?

[9 : 19] I'm not saying, you have, you will have to get rid of it. I'm just saying that, what would it mean if you had to? Whatever it is, whatever it is for you, it is good to consider how that would play out in your life.

And in verse 35, Jesus explains why we must live like this. Look with me, verse 35. for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

you see what he's saying, he's saying, you could save the children's happiness. You could save your reputation. You could ensure you have all money.

But if you're ready to lose those things for Jesus, for the sake of the gospel, you will save your soul, you will save your life. And verse 37, Jesus states it with such clarity.

If we're under any confusion as to what he's getting at, he's basically saying there is nothing in this world that you can gain that you can then use as sort of credit to pay for your life.

[10 : 31] There's nothing. And you see the reason that's the case. It doesn't matter at the end of the day if you get all the money your children are the happiest ever.

You've got the best reputation worldwide. You cannot use that to pay for your soul. And the reason that's the case, the thing that we have to remember is because it's actually exactly what Jesus has done for each of us.

The Son of God was totally happy, completely. 100% the happiest when he was with his Father in heaven before he came as a baby in the person of Jesus.

But Jesus denied himself that blessed existence coming down to earth, making himself one of us, experiencing all the difficulties of life that we experience, pain, sorrow, grief, anxiety, and then taking up this cross.

being a Christian, being a follower of Jesus means following his way of life in the same way Jesus gave up his life for us.

[11 : 49] We give up our old self for life. I read a quote the other day and I think this captures something of it and what it means to follow Jesus.

by an old guy written for him four years ago by a guy called Thomas Brooks and he writes this. He says, the gospel the good news of Jesus is a rose that cannot be plucked without prickles.

The legacy Christ has given us is the cross. even deciding to follow Christ you have to let go even that moment where you became a Christian was you were denying yourself in that moment because you had to let go of your pride and admit that you didn't have it all together and you needed Jesus to save you and for lots of people even doing that is too much because they want to say I've got it all together I don't need saving I've got everything together I don't need to admit that I haven't done it all.

Becoming a Christian means letting go of that and saying I don't have what it takes you have to deny yourself the very idea that you can save yourself without anything but Jesus can save because your reputation your money your fame your success whatever it is it won't pay for your soul only Jesus can save you okay so that's what it means to deny yourself but then you are going to look at two things a warning about shame and then an encouragement about endurance and what comes next is a warning and I'm going to start with an illustration of a situation that might cause us to feel ashamed why don't you imagine you're walking down the road with a friend and as you're walking down the road every single person that your friend walks past he thinks or she thinks it's hilarious funny to hurt everyone around people right left and centre everyone who walks past or drives past he's effing and jeffing taking a pop at their appearance insulting people being rude and rude some of the people they're shouting at live on the same street as you live they live next door he's hurling abuse at them and you imagine that you're walking down you're associated with them and everybody knows that you and this person who's like just acting totally horrendously to people is your friend

I want you to imagine him walking how would you feel if that were you you wouldn't know where to put yourself would you it would feel awkward you would feel embarrassed you would feel ashamed to be associated with someone acting that vulgar towards the rest of society people who you know who you knew on your street if that were you the reason you would feel like it's not them but it's their behaviour and to be associated with them would make you feel uncomfortable and what would you do if that were you you'd probably tell them to stop but if they carried on if it was so bad you might even distance yourself from them in that instance in that instance being ashamed of the behaviour of the friend would be entirely appropriate we get it I don't know maybe you can remember a time when you felt that kind of embarrassment that shame of being associated with something what Jesus says here to the disciples to the crowd and he says it to us is that you should never feel that way about him in this place you should never feel that way look with me verse 38 if anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation the son of man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his father's glory and the holy angels you see the reason he's giving this warning is because he's connecting it to what he's just said he's saying when we make other things more important than him it demonstrates in our hearts that on some level we're ashamed of Jesus words that have confronted that area of our lives because we're choosing not to live by them but we're choosing to live in opposition to

[16 : 44] Jesus words because we must think we know better have you ever felt like that have you ever felt like because you follow Jesus words and you know that they don't and you think they might be offended by what you believe the gospel or by Jesus himself you've ever felt that kind of embarrassment that kind of awkwardness that kind of shame well in verse 38 the warning is to feel that sense of Jesus that Jesus will be ashamed whoever's ashamed of him it's a strong warning it's a strong warning now I do want to just clear something up I've been guilty of feeling nervous and of when talking about Jesus with a new person feeling embarrassed of what they might think I've worried about what people think of me sometimes I've missed opportunities felt guilty that is very different to being ashamed of Jesus words feeling a bit nervous and a bit what will somebody think is very different to being ashamed of what

Jesus says it is perhaps fearing people and perhaps a bit of people pleasing but it's very different to being ashamed of Jesus words however there is a call here that we shouldn't retreat from being looked down on my eyes it will happen because Jesus was looked down on the wrong response would be that after being looked down on by others that the shame would be that after being looked down on by others you then looked down on Jesus that's what shame that's what being ashamed of Jesus would be like it's not feeling or other lives it is that after being looked down on by others you would look down on Jesus think and think less of Jesus and think less of his words perhaps you might take out the bits you don't like we have to remind ourselves that all of

Jesus' words give life every word in the Bible is life giving some are easier for people to hear some are harder but all of them are not to give life every single word okay that's a warning about shame that's the bit that hits us hard but I want to finish with an encouragement about enjoying the last thing that Jesus says is to motivate the disciples and to motivate us when taking the cross is hard I don't know if any of you into hill walking when I was little my parents used to take me on hill walks around Yorkshire and when I was little I kind of like doing it now as an adult but when I was little going up a hill I just I used to moan the whole way up I would not stop moaning until we get to the top when are we there how much further is it can I have a biscuit can I have a drink all the way up but it's always worth it when you get to the top because you get to the top of one of these hills and the district amazing views of all that area but on the way up through my moans my old man would attempt to encourage me all the way just wait until you get to see the view at the top imagine when you get to the top and his biggest encouragement was imagine when you get to the top and you'll be one of the highest people in the country it's amazing definitely going to get to the top or if that didn't work think of a Mars bar that's waiting for you when you have your lunch on the top we all need encouragements to keep going we need the vision we need the vision of what lies at the end it's what

Jesus is doing in verse 20 chapter 9 just look there he said to them truly I tell you some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power in the gospel of Mark the book that we've been going through Jesus actually here right now is pointing out for them in the immediate context he's pointing out what's going to happen in the next chapter in chapter 9 three of his disciples Peter, James and John do see Jesus in all his glory on the top of a mountain they see him shining like the sun but the point he's making to them that he's making as he says this now almost like as a prediction what's going to happen very soon to them is that he's going to reverse everything that has happened for those who persevere who take up their cross and live according to what Jesus says death will not have the family you might remember from last week of what

Jesus had told them if you just look back in the bible chapter 8 to verse 31 we read he then began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders the chief priests and the teachers of the law and then he must be killed what he says about denying themselves comes immediately after that that those who continue following him who deny themselves take up their cross and follow Jesus who will see his death who will see him on a cross will also see him raised and they will continue to see his kingdom come throughout the whole of their lives this is the big motivation to follow Jesus to turn and follow him because it is a hard path but at the end of the path at the top of the hill of your life if you follow him you will see God you will see Jesus you will be with him you will see God's kingdom you will taste his goodness in its final purity and so the motivation keep going keep going when it feels rough and when the prickles on the rows of the gospel are particularly thomly and sharp look at the flower that is

[23 : 16] Christ and know that the prickles that Jesus took when his hands and his feet were pierced keep going when you lose face when you're humiliated and when you ask is it all worth it because this is the path return to life this is the narrow way but it ends with you being glorified and seeing Jesus shining in all his glory Jesus does not invite us to try the cross onto the side and see if we like him he doesn't ask the volunteers to carry one for extra credit you see the call to carry a cross separates those who simply admire Jesus from those who do actually want to follow him Christians actually have to do remember that you know the hymn when I survey the wondrous cross Christians actually have to do more than just survey the wondrous cross as the hymn was saying they were saying carrying a cross it's not like those sort of sayings that go I've got a cross to bear it's not a physical affliction some problem in the family or a catastrophe it's not saying we all have our crosses to bear it is putting obedience to him above everything else knowing that it's the best thing that you can do with your life and will save your soul it's not the way that you get into the kingdom that's believing in who he is believing in his crop believing in his death in your place but it is the way that demonstrates that we are in and the reason we know that is because he put obedience to go to the cross above everything else that he did that's the reason what Christ did on the cross for us is the reason that he did take away let's pray we know that we can't do this on our own and so we ask for help when it seems particularly hard that you would help us to keep going that you would motivate us to keep on putting everything else to the side so that we'd be obedient to you forgive us when we've not done that you know many times that we've not done that so forgive us when we've not done that we thank you that we can know truth and confess confess through because of it was so bless us we pray we ask for this in the name of Christ Amen