

Mark 8:31-38

“Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” He called the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Life is full of choices isn't it? Just take a moment to think about how many different decisions that you made just to get to be here this morning.

Will I go to worship service this morning? What church service I will attend? What time to get up? Do I shower or bath or chance it? What will I wear? Do I eat before or after, maybe during? Which car will I drive? Which path will I take to get here? If you have children, what will they wear? Will I feed them? Will I take them?

Every day we are confronted with choices. Some of the choices that we make on a daily basis have very little impact on our lives such as where to eat or what we wear? While other choices can significantly change the course of our lives, such as; What career do I chose? What school do I attend? Do I get married? Where will we live? Do we have children? How long do we keep them? When do I retire? Do I retire? Can you relate to any of this?

In today's lesson from Mark's Gospel Jesus breaks some bad news to His disciples; He will soon have suffer and be put to death. We read, beginning with **verse 31**, *"Then He began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests,*

and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at His disciples, He rebuked Peter.”

Simon Peter loved Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah; he believed Jesus to be the Son of God. Simon Peter believed that Jesus was the one who had been sent to deliver Israel. How could the Messiah, how could his Messiah be put to death by ordinary humans? It didn't make any sense. He didn't want to argue with Jesus, but come on; surely there was an error somewhere in Jesus' understanding of things. So, not knowing what else to do, Peter did what Peter did best; he took Jesus aside and began to argue. But Jesus stopped him in his tracks and instead He corrected Peter. Jesus corrected Peter because Peter did not understand, and the reason Peter did not understand we read in **verse 33** *“For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* Whoa!

We do the same thing every day, every one of us. More often we have our minds on earthly things rather than divine or heavenly things. We read and/or hear the word of God and when we don't like what we are reading and/or hearing we proceed to either ignore and/or change things all around to

suit what we want to hear about what we are called to do and how we are called to do it. Examples of how we do this; we have discussed often misused passages such as **Mark 16:16** “*The one who believes and is baptized will be saved,*” And then my favorite **John 3:14-16, 18** “*just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life Those who believe in Him are not condemned.*”

You listen to almost anyone and they tell you all you have to do is believe, but we fail to realize and/or do not want to realize that this belief which is being spoken of here is unquestioning belief not just lip service. Not just saying “***I Believe***” and then continue as usual which is what most believe. Jesus loves you yes! Jesus does not want you to perish, yes? Jesus made a way for you, yes! But it takes more than just saying “Yes, I believe!”

This is where lent comes in, during lent we are all called to become, if we are not already, more mindful of our brokenness, mindful of the condition of our relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ and His Father,

and how we are in need of having this relationship set right with our God.

And here in our passage this morning Jesus tells us how to get our relationship set right with our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ and God.

God was and/or is all loving and He showed this by sending His son to die so we may live in a right relationship with Him, free from our sinful nature.

Have you ever been given a gift that you've simply failed to use? Millions have—every day! “People are letting cash slip away that they could be using,” says a senior analyst with CardHub: citing CardHub numbers, they estimate that some \$44 billion in unredeemed gift-card value has been accumulating since 2008. Bill Hardekopf, CEO of LowCards states “I’m not surprised by that number at all. “People get these cards and often put them away in a drawer and then forget about them..”

As God’s children, we have been given many invaluable gifts. God’s love has been deposited in our lives; a salvation that brings us forgiveness and healing. We have also been enriched with spiritual gifts that enable us to share God’s love in specific ways, so that others might also know the power of God’s love and healing.

Yet, every day, we fail to utilize these gifts or make full use of their great value. We have these riches our disposal, and the calling of God to use them to impact our world. But like so many consumers, we put the gifts and callings of God away in a drawer and forget about them. It's time we pull them out! It's time we redeem them! Experience the riches of a new life in Christ! It's time as Jesus the Christ said in this morning's passage in **verse 34** *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

Whoa preacher you didn't say I had to pick anything up, we are back at that *"believe"* thing again. Because if one truly believes one cannot help but *"deny themselves and take up their cross and follow."* Not that we have to work to be forgiven, not that one has to work to be saved that's not what I'm saying, but if one truly believe Jesus is the Son of God, if one truly believes Jesus is the Christ, if one truly believes in God the Father then one cannot help but *"deny themselves and take up their cross and follow."*

What's up with all this denying and cross carrying? I just thought I have to say "I believe" and that cleared everything up and I was home free. NO! And anyone telling you that or saying that is not speaking the gospel and as such is incorrect. This according to the Scriptures not just me.

What is this denying we have to do? It's really not denying in the sense we understand denying. We see denying as doing without and suffering miserably, but it's quite the opposite. If one puts Jesus first, puts God first, then one cannot help but put the needs of others first and as such you are not concerned well I'm missing out on all the fun stuff I could be doing instead of what it is I'm doing.

Thursday evening I received a phone call from a friend of mine and he asked me if I wanted to go with him this past Friday to Hendrix Motor Sports and tour the shop with him. And on the way home we could stop at Petty Enterprises and hopefully see Richard and tour his facility. This was going to be great, but wait I had a meeting set up with a group of individuals who are considering going into the ministry. But hay they have a lot of time to decide this right?

Besides Karen who is also a mentor, she could handle 5 people for four hours, right? How often will I have the chance to go behind the scenes of a NASCAR racing team?

Now, this is not anything earth shattering or life changing in my life but I had no question what I was going to do. I believe with all my heart the ministry of Jesus the Christ. I believe without question He was the son of God and that He died and rose from the dead for you and me. There was never a moment of hesitation because I believe I have to do what it is I have to do. When I have to debate with myself whether I want to do something for me or for Jesus then my relationship is skewed and off. If my relationship is right there is never an option or question Jesus first without hesitation.

When one of you has something to celebrate I have something to celebrate. I rejoice with you. When one of you is suffering and hurting I am hurting. You may not know this but when you hurt I hurt. That is why I call, that is why I say 'please let me know.' Because of my belief in Jesus the Christ I cannot help but do for you as well as for anyone else. And because of my relationship with Jesus the Christ I don't see it as denying me anything.

If you are someone who picks and chooses I do this or I'll attend that, mainly because you feel you would rather do what you do than "*Follow Him.*" If we believe we have to give up this or give up that to follow Him then maybe we need to revisit this "Believe" issue some more. Picking up your cross and following Him as our passage says "*take up their cross and follow me,*" Is not really that hard. It's not really denying, because if you truly believe and do then you are blessed as much as those you are being a blessing too. This "*take up their cross and follow me,*" is not hard, this cross is not really that heavy when you truly believe.

Do I struggle? Absolutely! Do I feel at times like I deserve more than what I'm doing? Absolutely! Does God send the Spirit of Unity to me from time to time to adjust my attitude? Absolutely! But it's because of what Jesus did on **that cross** for you and me that I can begin again. Each one of us can begin again all we have to do is "*take up their cross and follow Him,*" And with true belief Jesus is the son of God, true belief Jesus is the Christ, we'll discover together the cross is not really that heavy.