February 25, 2024 **ALWAYS CLOSE**

The gospel passage for this second Sunday in Lent is St. Mark 8:31-38, in verse 34 we read, “And when he had called the people to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” I have read many commentaries and explanations for this verse. Some suggest this act is talking about giving up things for God.

To understand what Jesus was saying, you must first see this verse in the context of this chapter and understand the cultural context: that is, to see what the cross meant to the people in the days of Jesus. In the verses 31-33, Jesus had made it very clear that His path will lead to self-denial and suffering and to a cross. When Jesus is talking about self-denial and suffering, He’s basically calling His disciples to follow in His steps in suffering for His cause of establishing the Kingdom of God
Culturally, the cross in the days of Jesus was not pretty jewelry around their necks; rather it was an instrument of torture, suffering and death. The point is, Jesus was laying out the realities for those who aspired to follow Him. It would involve two things: First, it would require denying self. To deny yourself means to turn from self-centeredness and every attempt to orient your life by your own self-interests. It’s to follow wholeheartedly the will of God, even if it means great sacrifice and hardship.

Second, it means to take up the cross of Christ. In Jesus’ day, bearing one’s cross conjured up the sight of a condemned man forced to demonstrate his submission to Rome by carrying the crossbeam through the city to his place of execution. So, to “take up our cross” is to accept our submission to Jesus against whom we had previously rebelled.

These two requirements of discipleship signify our total allegiance to Jesus and total relinquishment of everything you have to Him. Jesus continues in verse 35, “For whoever will save his life will lose it; but whoever will lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Jesus is not talking about the cost of our salvation here because salvation is free.

Romans 6:23 says, “…the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” There are many other scriptures that teach us the freeness of salvation. Today, when we talk of “saving souls” we’re usually referring to people being saved eternally from sin and God’s judgment in hell. So, it may surprise you to know that nowhere in the Bible, in either the Old or New Testaments, does the phrase “save a soul” ever refer to eternal salvation. It always refers to preserving or rescuing someone’s LIFE
Jesus is teaching that if we “lose” our lives (that is, take the road of self-sacrifice and cross-bearing), we will experience God’s best life for us. Conversely, even if we gain all the wealth and treasure in this world, but lose out on God’s best life for ourselves, we become losers in life. In other words, Jesus calls us to be losers to be winners in what is truly worthwhile in this life. Jesus is not talking about salvation here.​

But following Jesus is not all about what things we must be willing to face and endure for Him, but we can also see in another part of Scripture what it means to follow Jesus… A Road that requires obedience and submission, if you like to learn more about Jesus, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

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