



Sunday School Lesson for January 23, 2005
Released on January 19, 2005

"Jesus Called for Total Commitment"
PRINTED LESSON TEXT: **Mark 8:27-38.**

TIME: A.D. 29
PLACE: around Caesarea Philippi

GOLDEN TEXT: "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34b NKJV)

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. Questions-Mark 8:27-30
- II. Correction-Mark 8:31-33
- III. Instruction-Mark 8:34-38

LESSON AIMS

- 1. To teach that Jesus calls for total commitment in following Him.
- 2. To show that followers of Jesus are to demonstrate total commitment to Him.
- 3. To encourage daily self-evaluation that will result in greater commitment to following Christ.

LESSON TEXT

Mark 8:27-38.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

27Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?"

28So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

29He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

30Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

31And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be

rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

33But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him

34When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

35For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

36For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

37Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

38For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

INTRODUCTION

Envision this. You are about to take a long-awaited vacation to a sunny island resort and must fly to get there. As you walk down the airline's boarding ramp and enter the airplane, you search to find your seat and sit down. While settling into your seat and looking for your seatbelt, you hear a friendly voice come over the plane's intercom. "Good morning, passengers. We'd like to thank you for choosing to fly with Apathetic Airlines. Please note that today's flight from Newark to L.A. is being flown by a pilot who is not fully committed to flying... it's just a paycheck for him. In fact, he hasn't yet arrived at the airport, but we're expecting him to arrive at any moment now. In the meantime, please relax and enjoy your wait."

Or, how about this scenario? You have an aching lower molar, and suspect that you might need a "root canal" performed. You make an appointment with an unfamiliar dentist to whom you were referred by a co-worker. Hours later, you anxiously find yourself reclined in the dentist's chair wearing a paper bib and chain, and staring up into a bright lamp. Your heart rate quickens as you hear the dentist enter the exam room, and you hope that she is as good as your co-worker has said she is. "Will this hurt?" you ask. "How should I know?" the dentist replies. "Yours will be my first single-handed root canal since my clinical practices back in dental school. Besides, I didn't really choose this profession anyway! My deceased grandfather was a dentist and my mother thought my becoming one would be a noble way to honor his memory... Now, just relax, and let's hope that you won't feel anything after I stick you a couple of times with this long injector."

While these two situations are laughable in general, we know that it is very possible to find ourselves at the mercy of someone who-for whatever reason-is not totally dedicated to his/her profession. Likewise, halfhearted leaders never get much done either. People usually are not challenged to follow those who are not enthusiastic about what they do. If they're not excited and "sold out" about what is going on, chances are that you won't be either. Halfhearted preachers never get their congregations to take risks. When Jesus calls us, however, He sets the pace and

then calls us to walk into the unknown (unknown to us, anyway) with Him in total commitment.

Similar to airline pilots, dentists, and ministers, winning souls for Christ is a profession too-one that we who are saved must take seriously because countless lives are at stake. We are "seed planters" for Christ! Jesus said that He wishes or desires that no one should spend eternity away from Him (2 Peter 3:9). But do understand that everyone will live eternally somewhere. The question then lies in where eternity will be spent... with or without God.

BACKGROUND

The Gospel According to Mark is unique in that it is not a biography of Jesus, like Matthew or Luke, for it does not dwell on Jesus' family history or career. Instead, this Gospel is a record of Jesus' actions and achievements. It presents Jesus as a Saviour-King, who conquers demons, disease, and triumphantly death.

The 8th Chapter of Mark is the midpoint of the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ, and can be viewed as a turning point in this book's narrative. The encounter at the end of this chapter-today's lesson focus-is extremely important. Up to this point the question about Jesus had been "Who is this." In this encounter with Jesus, Peter definitively said that Jesus was the Messiah. From here on the emphasis would be on what kind of Messiah He would be. The disciples were about to be instructed on what it would cost them to follow Him. They would learn that it required total commitment.

QUESTION 1: Why did Jesus question His disciples regarding what people were saying about Him? (Mark 8:27)

Jesus questioned His disciples regarding what people were saying about Him not because He wanted to acquire information. He is God and is omniscient... He knows everything already. Rather, Jesus questioned His disciples because He was preparing them for a more important question to follow.

QUESTION 2: Who did the disciples say others thought Jesus was, and why would they reach such conclusions? (Mark 8:28)

The disciples' answers to Jesus' question about His identity restate popular misconceptions. They recall the statements made by King Herod and others in Mark 6:14, 15. Some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life (for at this time of Jesus' speaking, King Herod had already overseen the beheading of John the Baptist). Others thought that Jesus must be Elijah based on Malachi 3:1 and 4:5's message of a coming "messenger," "Elijah the prophet."

The people's belief that Jesus was Elijah-or any other prophet-meant they were not accepting Him as the Messiah, but merely as someone coming ahead of Him. The fact was that people did not understand who Jesus really was.

It is not enough for anyone to know who others think Jesus is. Each person must decide for himself, for one's eternal destiny is determined by this decision.

QUESTION 3: Why did Jesus ask the disciples who they thought He was? (Mark 8:29)

Again, Jesus was not asking this question because He needed to know an answer. He used this as a lead-in to give Him an opportunity to instruct His disciples in the truth. They would have to have a full understanding of who Jesus was and what He had come to accomplish if they were going to carry His message to the world after Jesus' departure.

Peter answers for the entire group when he tells Jesus that He is "the Christ." Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp firmly His true identity before He revealed to them the necessity of His coming death and resurrection. Note: in Mark's Gospel, only the disciples come to understand who Jesus is. The opposition of the religious leaders and the disciples' dullness is suddenly overshadowed by Peter's wonderful confession!

QUESTION 4: Why did Jesus tell them not to tell people about His identity yet? (Mark 8:30)

Whereas Jesus' warning for the disciples not to tell anyone who He was might seem strange, its explanation lies in the fact that the Jews expected the Messiah to be a political liberator. Jesus' first coming was meant to accomplish another kind of liberation-release from sin. Hence, Jesus was careful not to use the name "Messiah" publicly, for it was misunderstood by the Jewish people, their leaders, and the Roman authorities. He needed His disciples to remain silent about His identity until He could instruct them further. They needed to understand the complete picture, which included His death.

QUESTION 5: What caused Peter to take Jesus aside and begin to rebuke (or express disapproval to) Him? (Mark 8:31-32)

Jesus shared His future with His disciples. First, He was going to suffer many things. Second, He would be rejected by all the religious leaders of the nation. Third, He would be killed, and, fourth, He would return to life after three days of burial. This was a part of God's kingdom program, but the disciples did not anticipate it.

While it was characteristic of Peter to speak without always thinking things through, his love for Jesus was evident; which is why he spoke very vigorously to Him saying that Jesus must not be treated in this way-that He must not die. Peter's thoughts, born of fear and concern, were no doubt well-intended, but they did not take in God's eternal purposes and plan.

QUESTION 6: What caused Jesus to rebuke Peter in return? (Mark 8:33)

Jesus, in His scolding Peter, was not implying that Peter was indwelt by Satan, but Satan had certainly suggested his thoughts. If Peter had his way, Jesus' mission

would not have been accomplished.

The disciples had to accept a suffering Messiah, for there was no other way to pay for the sins of mankind. They could not stand in Jesus' way. They had to accept His eminent path and adjust to the kingdom program of God as He had planned it. Their level of commitment had to be even greater than they expected. So important was Jesus' death on the cross that for Peter to suggest it could be avoided was for him to become a tool of Satan. God had planned for Jesus' substitutionary death; Satan wanted that to be nullified at all costs.

QUESTION 7: What principle did Jesus teach the large crowd of people following Him at that time? (Mark 8:34)

Jesus' next words were for more than just His disciples. He addressed the entire crowd of people who were following Him, giving them even more instruction about the cost of being His followers. Jesus taught that in order to be His followers, people must give up their own desires and submit to God's, just as He was going to do when He died on the cross.

Sadly, it is popular even today for people to become followers of popular preachers and teachers without really putting into practice the things they learn. Nominal Christians often do not learn that they must deny themselves in order to put God first in their lives. As a result, they miss out on a great deal of joy that comes with fully submitting to God's will. We need to be willing to lay aside personal pleasure in order to please our Father.

QUESTION 8: What did Jesus say would happen to those who rejected Him, and how did He make vivid the folly of seeking comfort and safety instead of following Him? (Mark 8:35-37)

By rejecting Him they would forfeit eternal life for temporal safety and comfort. Some would decide it was too dangerous to follow Jesus, concluding that it was more important to protect their lives than to risk losing them. Jesus' stern warning for them was that while they saved their lives, they would lose their souls.

When a person is more concerned about his natural life and material well-being than he is about spiritual truth, he might enjoy everything that comes his way in this life, but he will be forever separated from God afterward.

QUESTION 9: What does the future hold for those who are ashamed of Christ? (Mark 8:38)

"When He comes in His glory," is the key of this address to the disciples (verses 34-38). This is the first glimpse of the fulfillment of all history (I Corinthians 15:24-28). Those who will reign with Christ invest their lives in that which will last. What is more, those who are willing to confess Him today will be rewarded before the Father in heaven. We must realize that our decision about where we spend eternity must be made before our encounter with God in heaven-before that day of reckoning.

Those who were listening to Jesus explain these truths had to realize that their

decision to follow Him or to turn away from Him had eternal consequences.

CONCLUSION

True discipleship means that we first acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Then we follow in His footsteps, remaining faithful to Him all the days of our lives.

As we have seen in previous lessons, when the Lord Jesus Christ calls a person, He asks for total commitment. The fishermen left behind their fathers and their nets. Levi left his lucrative tax-collecting table. As Peter said in Matthew 19:27, they had left all to follow Him. Dare we do less?

To those of you who are out of the eternal net of safety, why haven't you made a decision as to where you want to spend time after you die? Please, do not let another moment go by without being able to answer this question to the affirmative. There are only two places to spend eternity; in Heaven or in Hell. If you desire to be with Christ forever in Heaven, you can make a decision right now to do so. If you have not already confessed your sins, you have consequently already sealed your fate.

Consider the Following...

Church membership cannot save you...
You cannot afford to just take your chances...
You cannot afford to be wrong about Heaven and Hell...
You cannot save yourself...
Salvation is available to all who want it...
If you do not get saved, you will be forever separated from God...

How Can You Become Saved?

Recognize that you are a sinner... we all are. (Romans 3:10; 3:23)

Know that the price on sin is physical and spiritual death. (Romans 5:12; 6:23a)

Realize that God has the answer to sin through Jesus Christ's gift of eternal life. (Romans 5:8; 6:23b)

Understand that this gift of salvation is free to you RIGHT NOW. (Romans 10:9)

If you believe these statements, then trust God right now by saying this prayer, "Dear God, be merciful to me-a sinner. I am sorry for my sins, and now I trust the Lord Jesus Christ to save me. I take him now as my Lord and Saviour. I ask for eternal life that He paid for with His own blood. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen."

Welcome to the family of God! E-mail us and share with us your good news. We can now look forward to seeing you in God's kingdom!

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. To follow Christ fully, one must understand who he really is (Mark 8:27-29).
2. Christ is always willing to reach us, when and if we are ready to learn (vs. 30-31).
3. Foolish people jump to question God's ways rather than their own wisdom (vs. 32).
4. Careless speech may unwittingly ally you with Satan (vs. 33).
5. True disciples of Christ must be determined to commit everything to Him (vs. 34).
6. Every person must choose whether he will have his rewards here and now or in eternity (vs. 35-38).

PRAYER

Father God, we are grateful to You for providing us a means to spend eternal life with You through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Thank you, Lord, that we can find our strength through your joy. May we rededicate our lives to You-making those things that are important to You, important priorities in our lives. We trust, Lord, that if You have called us to do a work, You have also equipped us for that work. And, when the world gets dark and crazy all around us, we know that we can stand still and know that You are God.

Please remember our spiritual, local, national, and world leaders, Father, and all those who are suffering as a result of recent natural disasters. We know that You are still in control, and we love You for this. Please keep our troops and their families in Your care, Father, and bring them home safely at Your appointed time.

Thank You, Father, for those souls who decided to trust You today for their salvation. May they continue to burn with a sincere desire to study Your Holy Word. In the matchless name of Jesus, we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"To live is Christ, to die is gain."

LOOKING TO NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our next lesson we learn the meaning of true greatness in the eyes of God.

Date: January 30, 2005-Lesson 9

Title: "Jesus Defined True Greatness"

Lesson: **Mark 10:32-45**

Read: **Mark 10:13-45**

Time: A.D. 30

Place: on road to Jerusalem

Golden Text: "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44, NKJV)

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