

In our last study in Mark, Jesus asked the disciples to declare who they believed Him to be. Peter boldly declared that Jesus was not only the Son of Man but the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus told Peter that he was blessed because he had come to understand this by a revelation from God (Matthew 16:16,17ⁱ). The same is true for each of you. Those of us who realize Jesus is the Son of God have received a revelation from God. We are blessed. God drew us to Himself and opened our eyes to the truth and helped us receive His gift of salvation (John 6:44ⁱⁱ). It makes a spiritual world of difference to know that God has come as a man to declare His love for the world, to make a way for us to be right with Him, and to show us how to live. It is the difference between thinking God is distant or non-existent to knowing He is near, understanding, sympathetic, and involved in the details of our lives (Hebrews 4:15,16ⁱⁱⁱ). **One way is a hopeless end. The other is an endless hope.** That is just a part of the blessedness of knowing Jesus personally as the Son of God.

³¹ *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.* Mark 8:31 Once the disciples understood who He is, they were then ready to hear the warning of what He had to suffer. He will give them five more warnings according to the Gospel of Matthew. The Scriptures say that the disciples did not remember He had given these warnings until they saw Him risen from the dead (John 2:22^{iv}; 12:16^v). If it was only after the resurrection that they remembered, then the warnings served to strengthen their conviction that Jesus knew what He was doing.

When the movie *The Passion* was released, there was a lot of debate about who killed Christ. Certainly, He died for *our* sins. In this passage, Jesus declared that it would be at the hands of the religious leaders. They are the ones who, out of envy at His success, and anger over the exposure of their sins, insisted that He must be executed (Matthew 27:18^{vi}). While some people make this a case for antisemitism, this verse is putting it on the hands of the religious leaders. They were mostly the Sadducees who compromised with Rome to stay in charge of the temple. Their greed had corrupted the entire temple worship. Jesus was interfering with their financial gain through the money exchangers and approval of sacrifices. They worked with Rome to keep any Messianic fervor to a minimum so that they might stay in power. Jesus said they had made the temple a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13^{vii}). The people appreciated Jesus confronting the situation. They knew what the abuse of the temple system personally cost them.

The loss of income and the threat of a Messianic uprising had caused these religious leaders to decide that they must eliminate Jesus. This is the first warning in Scripture that Jesus gave to the disciples declaring that He would be killed but also promising that He would rise again. How did they forget such a momentous prediction? Perhaps they thought it was a parable, or they just did not want to think that He might die, as we see in the following verse.

³² *And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* Mark 8:32 Witherington points out that *Mark has structured his narrative so that he stresses that Jesus faces a severe temptation at the three most crucial turning points in the narrative: (1) the beginning of the ministry; (the temptation in the wilderness,) (2) at Caesarea Philippi where he is partially “unmasked” by a disciple (who then rebukes*

Him for saying He will be killed) and (3) at the Garden of Gethsemane. In each case the nature of the temptation is to try and avoid what God wants Jesus to do and be.^{viii}

Jesus had given this warning in very clear terms. Peter knew the prophecies that the Messiah would reign forever. He just declared Jesus is the Messiah, so how could it be that Jesus could say He was going to be killed? Peter did not understand the Isaiah predictions of the Suffering Servant who would bear the sins of many and give His life as a ransom for our souls (Isaiah 53:5,6^{ix}). He did not understand that we must be redeemed before He can reign in our hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:18^x), and that the kingdom of God is not of this world but is something much greater than the temporary kingdoms of man. In addition, Jesus said He would rise again. That was another mystery Peter did not yet fathom. King David predicted that the Messiah's soul would not remain in the grave and his body would not decay (Psalm 16:10^{xi}). Isaiah wrote that after the Righteous One was slain for our sins He would prolong His days and see the anguish of his soul and be satisfied (Isaiah 53:10,11^{xii}). Though He is slain, He will indeed reign forever. He reigns now in the hearts of those who know Him as Lord. He will reign over all the earth in the Millennial Kingdom. We will see in the next verse how shortsighted Peter's rebuke was, even to the extent of being demonically inspired.

³³ *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."* Mark 8:33 By Jesus turning to the disciples we should probably see this as Peter representing all of them. None of them thought He should die. This was the battle He would have in the Garden of Gethsemane. Did He have to die? Did He have to endure the cross and sins of the world placed upon Him? Did He have to face the wrath of God upon those sins? Was there some other way? But Jesus knows this is Satan's temptation. If Satan could tempt Jesus to try to save mankind by some other way than what is acceptable to His righteous Father, then Satan would win. This battle was so intense that while praying about it in the Garden the capillaries in Jesus' forehead ruptured causing Him to sweat drops of blood (Luke 22:44^{xiii}). This is a realm of spiritual conflict we cannot fathom. This is the battle over the souls of mankind, the forming of Christ's bride. That is why the rebuke to Peter was so sharp.

The first major battle was when Jesus fasted for 40 days. Satan tried to get Jesus to use His divine power apart from the Father's will. Jesus saw through his schemes (see Matthew 4:1-11). If He failed to remain in the Father's will He would not have died for us. Our passage today is the second great temptation, to not accept the need to be a sacrifice on our behalf. The final one was in the Garden of Gethsemane. All these great spiritual battles were about us. We are certainly not worthy, but Jesus could see what He could do in our lives and the beauty of the finished work (Revelation 21:2^{xiv}). A work of art is even more impressive when the raw material the artist works with is flawed. We can say that the disciples' problem is what Jesus declared: *not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.* We face this in our very limited way throughout every day of our lives. We continually choose one or the other. We learn the ways of God and the declarations in the Word and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, but we are more familiar with the things of man. You have more than likely already made a choice between the two several times this morning. Think back to when you rose. Was God first in your thoughts? Did you thank Him for another day of life? Did you say, "Good morning Lord," or "Good Lord it's morning! ". If you live with a spouse did you

put that person first? When faced with conflict did you turn to the Lord? And when you came in the sanctuary this morning, was your heart prepared to worship the Lord? Did you seek out to whom the Lord might have you be a blessing? Where we set our mind determines which things we have chosen, things of God or things of man. Even in the mundane routines of life our minds can be set on God. Meals can be a time of fellowship and thanksgiving. Cleaning the house can be a time of prayer. Everything we do can be for the glory of God. ³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Corinthians 10:31

Paul expressed the same concept to the Colossians. ¹ *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

Colossians 3:1,2 Peter's mind in our passage was on the things that are on earth. We would probably have done the same thing if we were not filled with the Spirit. Sadly, that is the natural state of man. But Paul is challenging us to do what Jesus was pointing to here for all who have been raised with Christ to newness of life. Did you die to yourself? Did you put to death your old nature and rise with Christ? That is the picture baptism represents (Romans 6:3,4^{xv}). Are you surrendered to the Holy Spirit? Then seek the things that are above and set your mind there. That is only possible if we are continually being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18^{xvi}). How do we do that? Jesus explains in the following verses.

³⁴ *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* Mark 8:34 We would all do well to memorize verses 34 through 38. This is how we live that kind of life that sets our minds on things of God. First let us note that Jesus called the crowd to come and hear this. That means it is for us all, not just Jesus' apostles. This is what the normal Christian life should be for all who would follow Jesus. "Come after me" is usually interpreted as being a follower, a disciple. But perhaps we could also see it as being a witness to the world after Jesus ascends to the Father. If I ask, "Who will come after me?" what I mean is who will be the preaching elder at Wayside when I am gone. Jesus may have been asking, "Who will witness to the world that the things of God are where our minds should be fixed when I depart?" If you know you are called to be that kind of person, to follow Jesus, but also to witness to the world the truth of the gospel, you must deny yourself of prioritizing worldly desires.

Our old self has a lot of demands. To follow Jesus, we need to deny many of its demands. Your body has natural demands, and they need to be met just to go on living to serve. You must eat and drink and sleep to live to serve. But your soul has lots of demands that are unnecessary and often selfish. Our old nature wants to always be comfortable, respected, fit in, be free of stress, and have plenty of things to enjoy. Those things in themselves are not evil, but when we put them before God, that is when we are setting our mind on the things of man. The normal fallen human being thinks only on those things. To follow Jesus and be a light in a world of darkness we must learn to deny those demands in favor of the things of God (Romans 6:11-14^{xvii}).

The next thing a follower of Jesus must do is to take up their cross. This is a radical demand. When Rome would sentence someone to crucifixion the ruler would proclaim, "Put the cross on the man!" That meant the crossbeam would be set on your shoulders and tied to your arms and you would be led to the site of your execution. It

means your life is over. Jesus is repeating the demand to deny yourself, only it is said in an illustrative way that helps us see the seriousness of it. For the joy that was set before Him Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2^{xxviii}). We too take up the cross of Christ for the joy that is set before us, service to our Lord who calls us His beloved (Song of Songs 6:3^{xix}), who gave Himself for us that we might live in Him (1 Timothy 2:6^{xx}).

And the third demand of discipleship is to follow Jesus. We are to go where He leads (Luke 12:26^{xxi}). We follow His way of total obedience to the Father. It is not that we will be perfect in doing so, but we follow as He enables us and grow in His likeness until that glorious day when we see Him face to face (1 John 3:2^{xxii}). Our heartbeat is to serve Him in love and do whatever He leads us to do and strive to do it in the way He has demonstrated. We seek His life in us to be manifest in our words and deeds. Why would Jesus want us to live in such self-denial? Jesus explains in the next verse.

³⁵ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.* Mark 8:35 What is life? The Bible tells us that there is biological life, soul life, and there is spiritual life (1 Timothy 5:6^{xxiii}). Our soul life is the word used here. It is our desires and thoughts that we must surrender to Christ. Jesus told us He is the Life (John 5:24^{xxiv})! If we are in Him, we are living in life, eternal life, life that is the light of men (John 1:9^{xxv}). It is truth, which is another thing that Jesus declared Himself to be. "I am the truth!" Jesus told Pilate that everyone who is on the side of truth listens to me (John 18:37^{xxvi}). Life, truth, light, these are only found in Jesus.

This fallen world is filled with those who are spiritually dead, walking in darkness, living for their soul's desires. There is a lot of research and products that promote longevity. It is a money-making field because so many see their carnal life as all there is. They are losing their spiritual life when that is their focus. There is nothing wrong with living a long life. It is a blessing. But if we focus on this present life being extended to fulfil our fallen desires more than we desire the life that is in Jesus, we have missed the whole reason we have this physical life.

I think the illustration of a ladder reaching the top of skyscraper is a good analogy. After climbing our whole life when we get to the top we may find we have placed it on the wrong building. Then it is too late. If we placed it on the building of *the things of men*, we have lost it all. If it is Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12,13^{xxvii}), *the things of God*, we find eternity in the presence of our glorious loving Savior. Both have eternal life as far as existence goes. Only one has the light of life and fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11^{xxviii}).

³⁶ *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*
³⁷ *For what can a man give in return for his soul?* Mark 8:36,37 If Satan took you to a high place and showed you all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and offered them to you if you would just bow before him, what would you really gain by worshiping him if you lost your soul in the process (Luke 4:5-8^{xxix})? Your soul is your mind, will, and emotions, the same word as life in the previous verse. Living for the world takes over all three realms of who we are. Many people who have had it all ended up taking their life because nothing truly satisfied them. Some of the most famous people die by their own hand because all they thought would satisfy left them empty, and they refused to turn to God. Numerous musicians tell of selling their soul to the devil and then finding the success they sought but with the angel of death close behind. What good did a life of fame do when the soul is cast into eternal torment.

What can a man give in return/exchange/as a ransom for his soul? What is more valuable than your very being? Even a slave retains his or her soul. A slave can hope and dream and desire. But a slave of sin loses their very soul. What can buy back or ransom it? Only the blood of Jesus who took what our sins deserve upon Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxx}). He puts His life within us and makes us free to truly live and love.

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Mark 8:38 On one of our trips to Israel I met a person who had served in several positions in the government and whose family was well known in the nation. The person told me that they had seen a manifestation of Jesus. They described Him to me and told me they believed He is the Messiah. I asked them if they had told their family and made their newfound faith known. The person told me that they felt it would be a national scandal if they did so. That is when I felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to share this verse with them. The person was a bit taken aback but still wanted to listen to teachings from Jesus in the Gospels.

I have also talked with the son of the chief of a Muslim tribe in West Africa who came to know Christ as his Savior. He boldly proclaims Christ at the risk of his life. He uses farming assistance and children’s education to bring the gospel to many. He is not ashamed of the gospel or in fear of what others may do to him. God is abundantly blessing his faithful witness.

We all face the same issue of fitting in and being accepted or sticking out as different for our convictions about who Jesus is and what He has done for all of mankind. It comes back to minding the things of God more than the things of man. We may not have all the answers, but we know what He has done for us and the blessings we have received because of our faith in what He accomplished for us on the cross. Speaking up when we are given the opportunity not only pleases His heart, because it demonstrates how we have put Him above fear of rejection, but also because He speaks through us to hearts He has been preparing to receive the Good News (1 Peter 3:15^{xxxi}). One of the greatest blessings is knowing that He will not be ashamed of us when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. Is your identity a follower and servant of Jesus your Lord? Is your mind set on the things of God, or is it set on the things of man? In trying to save your life are you losing your life? Or have you found new life in Jesus? These are questions of eternal consequence. Jesus longs to give us new life in Him.

Questions:

- 1 What difference can knowing who Jesus is make in our lives?
- 2 Why is this a turning point in Jesus’ ministry?
- 3 Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?
- 4 Why was Jesus’ response so harsh?
- 5 What two things do our minds dwell on?
- 6 How did Paul say to think as we should?
- 7 What three things did Jesus say we need to do to follow Him?
- 8 What reason did He give to do so?
- 9 What was the warning He gave us?
- 10 Do people recognize you as a follower of Jesus?

ⁱ **Matthew 16:16-17 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

ⁱⁱ **John 6:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{iv} **John 2:22 (ESV)**

²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

^v **John 12:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.

^{vi} **Matthew 27:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

^{vii} **Matthew 21:13 (ESV)**

¹³ He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

^{viii} ¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 241.

^{ix} **Isaiah 53:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

^x **John 14:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

^{xi} **Psalms 16:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

^{xii} **Isaiah 53:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

^{xiii} **Luke 22:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Hematadrosis happens when intense stress causes capillaries to break.)

^{xiv} **Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

^{xv} **Romans 6:3-4 (ESV)**

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

^{xvi} **Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

^{xvii} **Romans 6:11-14 (ESV)**

¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

xviii **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

xix **Song of Songs 6:3 (ESV)**

³ I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies.

xx **1 Timothy 2:6 (ESV)**

⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

xxi **John 12:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

xxii **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

xxiii **1 Timothy 5:6 (ESV)**

⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

xxiv **John 5:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

xxv **John 1:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

xxvi **John 18:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

xxvii **Genesis 28:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring.

xxviii **Psalms 16:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

xxix **Luke 4:5-8 (ESV)**

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

xxx **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xxxi **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,