

Title: Come and Die  
Text: Mark 8.27-38  
Theme: The high cost of discipleship  
Series: Jesus said that?! – #4  
Prop Stmt.

As part of the reading that I did this week for my soul and in preparation for this message, I took Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work, "The Cost of Discipleship" and read through some of the chapters. Dietrich was a promising theological student who grew up in Germany, was educated in the States and returned to Germany during Hitler's rise to power. The country was in such economic turmoil that it was looking for someone with a strong hand who could lead them out of the mess. Hitler fit the bill. His policies demanded more and more control over the country's manufacturing, education, media and religious influences. Politically, Bonhoeffer saw what most did not want to admit and he spoke out against it. He was particularly grieved at the church who through a series of compromises chose to be silent about Hitler's atrocities instead of standing up and speaking out. Spiritually, he saw that the church had abandoned the clarity and the call of the gospel in order to be accepted by the culture. The German church wrapped itself in the German flag, and when following the flag meant abandoning the gospel, the leaders chose the flag. To follow Christ and his gospel, would cost too much and they were not willing to pay that price.

The Socialistic/Totalitarian, Christ-redefining and gospel-rejecting path of Germany in the 1930's is being repeated in our country. I cannot control Washington, but I can speak out in the church. The flag that stood for freedom of religion and freedom of speech, now stands for freedom to kill unborn children, freedom for gay-marriage, and freedom of the government to silence those who dare to call it sin. The times are changing and I want you prepared. I must call you from peace-time to being battle-ready. By God's grace we will be a gracious, humble, yet deliberate people who do not surrender the gospel for the sake of appeasement.

Read Text:

When Jesus was on the earth, he was in an earthly body. That means that he was physically present in one place at a time. He walked. He ate. He drank. He slept. He touched. He spoke. He looked. There was real physical contact and interaction. He was not vague, ethereal, mystical or fuzzy. When he walked up to a couple of fisherman who were tending their nets and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men", they literally and physically walked away from what they had been doing and followed him. The call and the way to carry out the call were very clear. They physically walked on the same path with him. But as they walked with him, he told them what the cost was to continue with him. He told them that, "if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Jesus Christ lived and taught a value system that makes no sense to those whose eyes have not been opened to treasure him above all. For example: Christ lived and taught that:

- 1) Humility was the means to Exaltation;
- 2) Death was the means to life;
- 3) Rejection was the means to Acceptance
- 4) Suffering was the means to Joy

Just about everything that we naturally want to avoid Christ calls us to embrace. What kind of a life is this? Who would ever follow a leader who champions these things? Following Christ makes no sense except this. Following Christ is the only means by which you can ever know what it means to really live! Following Christ is the only means by which you can be declared righteous. Following Christ is the only means by which you can enjoy God for ever. And since eternal life sounds attractive, there is at least something in the message of Christ that has some appeal.

So, in an effort to attract the most number of people, Christianity has tried to capitalize on the one portion of the message that appeals to the widest possible audience. How many of you want to go to heaven when you die? That was the big selling point of the gospel for many years. But, as life, at least here in the States has become pretty easy in the past 50 years, even that portion of the message began to lose its appeal. It's like that great theologian Kenny Chesney sings, "Everybody want to go to heaven, but nobody wants to go now." So, what is a church to do, when people don't care about heaven any more? Well, you can attract them by telling them that they can have heaven now. Tell them that they can have their best life now. They don't have to wait for heaven.

So, in an effort to gain market share, churches have tried to capitalize on what people want now. People want great sex, so it has become trendy for churches to try to appeal to that by advertising to the community that for the next 4 weeks, our church is talking about how to have great sex! People want to have money, and the economy stinks, so it is trendy to for churches to try to appeal to that desire by doing a series on this. Please listen carefully, because I can be easily misunderstood. Should the church talk about sex? Absolutely! God does. Should the church talk about money? Absolutely! God does. But, the way Christianity has shamelessly and undiscerningly and foolishly embraced marketing tactics is destroying the church.

Here is what is happening. Churches are told that in order to grow, they have to open the front door as wide as possible (attract the greatest number of people) and close the back door as tight as possible (do everything you can to prevent anyone from ever leaving). That is a great business model – if you are McDonalds or Lowe's Home Improvement.

But when you read through the gospels you see Christ doing an unusual thing. He opens the back door as wide as possible and makes the front door narrow. In other words, he makes it very clear that if you are going to follow him, it will not be easy. It will be difficult. Over and over he gives his followers the opportunity to leave. The rich young ruler is a perfect example of that. Over and over Christ attempts to change the view that his followers have of him. They see the miracles, and they want that. They see some of the benefits and they are attracted to that. But instead of building his ministry and message on the benefits, his teaching is full of instruction that explains why he is here.

In our text (Mark 8), Christ has fed over 4,000 people, and healed a blind man. But then, he asks his disciples who they think he is. At this point Jesus asks his disciples who they thought he was. I used to think that the question was pretty strange. After all, wasn't the fact that he was the Messiah the reason they were following him in the first place? Why did he ask them who they thought he was, and then (v.30), why did he warn them not to tell anyone? The reasons become clear when you keep on reading. Christ had to completely change their perception of the Messiah. In other words, he was telling them, that yes, I am the Messiah, but no, I am not what you think the Messiah is. The Messiah must suffer many things, is going to be rejected, and will be killed. Do you see what Christ is doing? He is telling them something that they did not understand. The Messiah is going to suffer, be rejected and die. This was not what they expected. Peter, then takes Christ aside (v.32) and began to rebuke him! At this point, Christ sharply rebukes Peter and says, "Get behind me Satan!" "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." What did Peter say? He was denying the very purpose for the life and ministry of Christ on the earth. Peter did not want to follow a Messiah who was going to die because that meant that he would have to suffer, be rejected and probably die too, and he did not sign up for that. He wanted a Messiah who would make his life better, not worse! I've got enough problems, I don't need more.

"Then" (v.34), notice the word "then". At this point, when Christ has started explaining to them what the mission of the Messiah was, he then called the crowd to him along with the disciples and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

At this point Christ has just raised the bar. It is difficult for us to feel the full weight of these words. We wear crosses as pieces of jewelry. We adorn caskets with them and send cards to people with images of them surrounded by ferns and flowers. They knew none of that. They knew what a cross was. Every person hearing what Christ said, had seen criminals and political enemies of the Roman Empire humiliated, tortured and executed on these disgraceful racks of death. Parents had to cover the eyes of their children to shield them from such gruesome displays of violence. And now, Jesus, is telling these people, some of whom had left the comforts of home, their vocations, and their routine of life to follow him that if they were truly going to come after him, they had to take up his cross because following him was a great deal more serious than what they had thought. Notice how v.34 begins: "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples..." These words were not just for the 12 disciples. These words were for all of us. And the big idea is this: Say no, in order to say yes!

We are to see Christ as so precious that we savor nothing else like we do him. That means that we must say no to things so that we can say yes to him. Christ refuses to be viewed as a means to an end. He is the end. The goal in life is not comfort and he will help you get it. The goal in life is not wealth and he will help you get it. The goal in life is not being accepted, and affirmed. So many people view Christ as a ticket to a better life. I need a job; I think I'll try Jesus. My family is all messed up, I'm going to give Jesus a shot and see if he will fix it. So, a few months before, Jesus is walking along the

shoreline of the Sea of Galilee and he says to some fisherman, Follow me. Peter did, why? Following Jesus was going to make his life better. Following Jesus was going to be his ticket up the ladder. Now, Jesus tells him and the others that the way up is the way down.

1. **The Cost - Following Christ is the invitation to come and die.** (“if” - 34)

This is staggering! Either Christ is completely insane – or he is God. Only God could make such a radical demand upon us that is reasonable. Only God would have the right to do so. Because only God could promise you that if you laid down your life for him, he would raise it back up.

**A. We are called to deny ourselves.**

Next Sunday morning, our high school seniors will stand here in front of us and tell us what school they graduated from, and what plans they have for the future. As we listen to them, we will be tempted to think, and they will be tempted to think, “Here is my life, my plan and my dream, I want God to help me accomplish it all!” No! Wrong dream! Christ says, deny yourself. You want to follow me? Deny yourself! This is not about you. God’s job is not to give you everything on your want list. Your dreams, your goals, your desires, your wants – if you want to pursue them, go for it, but do not call yourself a follower of Christ. “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.” God’s dream is more important than your dream. Christianity has become so self-obsessed that what I just said sounds like heresy, when in reality, the way we live is a fundamental denial of his Lordship. He is God, we are not! He has the right to say, give up your life for me! Lay down your life for me! Deny yourself for me!

So, here is what it means to follow Christ. This statement that Christ made is right here at the beginning, not the end. This is how we start with Christ. We start by giving up our dreams, setting aside our comforts, and abandoning our plans to the King. We give up “my rights”. I want you to know this up front.

But, God is not glorified in us, when we are miserable. God takes no delight in stomping on you and crushing your heart. The fact is, many of the dreams and desires and plans that you have are good and there is nothing wrong with them, except the way you think about God’s relationship to them. You want a job? Good! But don’t follow Christ as a means to get a job. Oh no! Here is how you are think: Get a job in order to help you carry out your calling to follow Christ. Christ is the goal, not the job, or the money or the status. What Christ is saying here, is that everything in life serves Him because he is the greatest goal because he is the greatest treasure and the greatest value. He is even more precious than your mom or dad or children.

*“To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us. Once more, all that self-*

*denial can say is” ‘He leads the way, keep close to him.’”<sup>1</sup> Is there anything that you are not willing to give up for Christ?*

### **B. We are called to take up his cross.**

What do you think of when you hear, “this is the cross that I have to carry”? Do you think of some physical ailment, some challenging family situation, or perhaps one of life’s disappointments? Let me help you think clearly about this. If you will look carefully at this statement, you will notice that Christ is referring only to those who follow him. My reason for pointing this out is because often times, what we call “our cross to bear” is not really a cross to bear. If what we bear is no different than what other people endure who are not followers of Christ, then we really cannot call it a cross.

For example, if I were diagnosed with cancer, that would not be my cross to bear. Cancer comes to believers and non-believers alike. However, if what I am suffering is directly related to my following Christ – then that would be my cross to carry. But we are called to suffer what Christ suffered. But here is where the call of Christ is so different. If all that Christ did was suffer, then we would be drawn by the example of his selflessness.

Last weekend, Detroit resident Garrett Townsend (58) died while rescuing a 7 year old neighbor boy from drowning. Garrett couldn’t swim, but that did not stop him from jumping in a water-filled ditch that was to be used as a basement for a new home. He was able to push the little boy onto the edge before he went back under the water because he was not able to climb up the muddy sides of the pit. We applaud and admire this man’s act of giving of his life to save another. That is the highest humanitarian act that we can think of. If that was all that Christ suffered in our place, we could understand aspiring to that example. But, carrying the cross is more than dying for someone as a humanitarian act of self-sacrifice.

What does it mean to carry the cross? And how do I relate this seemingly heavy command to carry the cross to the statement that Christ made that his yoke is easy and his burden is light? I want you to see that these statements are not in conflict with each other, but actually relate perfectly together. In order for you to understand what it means to carry the cross, you need to understand what happened at the cross. The cross is the supreme statement made by God about how serious my sin is, and how magnificent his grace is. Let me explain. The cross magnifies the glory of God because in the death of His Son, God put his infinite righteousness on display. He ordained that his Son would die because our sin is that serious. Our sin is that hideous. Our sin is that repulsive and despicable and offensive and liable for such intense judgment that only an infinite Savior could absorb the infinite wrath of God which was aroused because his infinite holiness was so horrifically offended. There on the cross in the death of Christ is the righteousness of God, the holiness of God, the justice of God is set on display. The cross screams out the seriousness of our sin and the intensity of God’s wrath against it. The holiness, the righteousness, the justice of God are all part of the character of God. When God’s character is made known, God is being glorified. So, what does it mean to carry

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<sup>1</sup> The Cost of Discipleship, p. 88

the cross? Carrying the cross means to identify with, to accept and embrace God's attitude toward sin. When you say what Christ says about sin, then expect to be treated as Christ was treated. People may respect you if you sacrifice for others, but they will hate you if you speak out against their sin. Will you carry the cross?

I believe the day will come when the leaders and members of this church will be ostracized socially because we dare to hold to the Scriptures. I also believe that the leaders and members of this church will face arrest and fines and jail for the same reasons. There are sins that God condemns that our culture is attempting to champion. I want you ready for that.

But there is another aspect to the answer of what it means to carry the cross. At the cross, God not only displayed his righteousness, he displayed his grace and mercy. Instead of judging me with his infinite wrath, he chose to judge his Son in my place. Colossians 2.14 says that God canceled the record of our debt by nailing it to the cross. Imagine that every sinful thought and deed that you have ever done and will ever do, was written down. That record stands as a testimony to your shame and condemns you as one guilty and liable for punishment. That record, ever seen by others, ever made public would make it evident to all that you belong in the eternal cell of the world's most diabolical and evil wretches. But, instead of reading this account of your sins, and justly using it as a warrant to send you to hell God took that account and placed it into the hand of his own Son, and then he drove a nail through them both into the cross. And in so doing, he considered the death of his Son as payment – in full. Your sin, is no match for his grace!

Therefore, to carry the cross, not only means to embrace what God says about sin, it also means to pronounce what God says about his mercy. The mercy of God, the grace of God, and the love of God are all part of the character of God. Your world may hate you because of your agreement with God about sin, and when they see grace under fire and mercy refined in trial, it may embolden them to mock you without fear of retaliation.

*“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. ...the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise godfearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>2</sup>*

Are you willing to stand with God and with the true people of God with what he says about sin? Are you willing to stand with God and with the true people of God with what he says about mercy? Next week: Anything that helps me see and savor his righteousness, anything that helps me magnify his mercy and grace is a gift and a joy. This is why dying is the only way to live.

“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Lk 14.27

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

2. **The Cause - Dying is the only way to live.** (“for” – 35-37)

A. This present world

- 1) Save but lose - 35
- 2) Gain but forfeit – 36

B. Christ’s future Kingdom.

3. **The Consequence – Shame now or Shame later** – v.38