

DISCIPLESHIP

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SLIDE:

1. INTRODUCTION (8:34a-b)

“**34** Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples:

After rebuking Peter in verse 33 for his wrong understanding or misconception about the Lord Jesus Christ's mission on earth, He is now SETTING the stage to those people who would desire to FOLLOW Him sincerely.

It is very clear at this time that if we REALLY desire to experience the TRUE meaning and PURPOSE of life,

and if we really want to INVEST on something that will lasts, **THEN, this is it!** We NEED to RECEIVE His INVITATION.

This INVITATION is CRUCIAL because **the ONLY way to EXPERIENCE TRUE life** is by GIVING your life to Jesus. **I'm afraid there's NO other way of FULFILLING your purpose in life** OTHER THAN allowing Him to be the King of our hearts.

This is what Christianity is ALL about. This is what discipleship is ALL about. **This is our Lord's OUTLINE** of the process of discipleship. **And here of course,** in His own words, we look at WHAT IT MEANS to be a disciple.

This is a very profound TRUTH we need to RECOVER in our churches today where people nowadays are just professing close association with Christ and giving their own definition of Christianity BUT their lives are NOT manifesting the TRUTH of the gospel in terms of Mark 8:34-38.

This is what happened in the Gospel of John when many people are following Christ because of the blessing of provision, **the blessing of healing and things like that,** BUT when CONFRONTED to follow Jesus in the heat of persecution and sufferings they're GONE! **They disappear in the scene!**

And so, John 6:66 tells us, "From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him." **I think we need to recover** the TRUE meaning of Christianity and what it REQUIRES of us because it is becoming rarer to see Christianity in a Biblical way.

Again, this is imperative that we get this because people might attempt to REINVENT or RESHAPE what Christianity is all about and what it involves **BUT under God** His perspective is the one that would matter NOT ours. **At the end of the day**, it is God who has the FINAL say.

Therefore, our study today DEMANDS careful attention especially to those who claim they are Christians OR those who confessed that they belong to Jesus. **This is PROFOUND** and HEART-CONFRONTING because it forces us to EXAMINE our own relationship with Christ **and to CONFRONT the reality of our own hearts** whether we REALLY mean it when we say WE WANT TO FOLLOW Jesus!

SLIDE: And so, going back to verse 34 it says, “**34** Then He called the crowd to Him along with His disciples:” This is surprising because at first we thought the audience here are just His disciples.

SLIDE: For example in Matthew 16:24 it says, “Then Jesus told His disciples, if anyone wants to come after Me.”

SLIDE: But in Luke 9:23 it says, “He said to **ALL**, if anyone wants to come after Me.....” Emphasis Added

We are NOT sure about the extent of the word “**ALL**” here in Luke BUT it becomes clearer when we read **Mark 8:34**, “Calling the crowd TOGETHER with His disciples.” And therefore, the narrative and theological significance for Mark is that the REQUIREMENTS for following Christ are NOT just for the Twelve BUT ALSO for ALL Christians.

We do NOT know for sure if this crowd has been present all along OR where they from the surrounding villages and heard about Jesus presence in the region. **And the reality** that Jesus called the crowd TOGETHER with the disciples has raised questions in people's minds **Whether it is possible to be a Christian** and NOT be a disciple **OR** Is DISCIPLESHIP a Next level of Christianity?

And so, this is a very IMPORTANT question that we need to reckon and one our Lord Himself will answer for us as we progress in our study. **So,** stay with me until the end of the sermon and we will find out the truth from Jesus Himself.

SLIDE:

2.CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (8:34c-d)

‘Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me.’

Right after the INVITATION in our FIRST POINT. Jesus now turns and addresses ALL those who would FOLLOW Him. **There are THREE requirements of discipleship** that He mentioned in this particular verse.

FIRSTLY, He says, “Whoever wants to be My disciple MUST DENY himself...” **The word “DENY”** here means TO DISAVOW any connection with something, to state that you are NOT connected in any way with whatever is in view.

By DENIAL OF SELF, Jesus does NOT mean resisting specific material things or giving up luxuries, or even necessities. **What Jesus meant by DENIAL OF SELF**

is that we must RENOUNCE the CENTRALITY of SELF; that we REPUDIATE our natural feelings about ourselves, **our RIGHT to RUN our own lives** and our RIGHT to decide what we are going to do **OR** where we are going to go.

This is staggering especially when we are confronted with this kind of statement coming from Christ Himself asking us TO DENY OURSELVES. **It strikes right at the very core of our being**, because the one thing we, as human beings, value above anything else is the right to DECIDE and RUN our own lives.

We always say that this is my life and therefore, I decide what I'm going to do OR where I am going to go. **We refuse to be under anything or anyone**, BUT reserve the right to make ultimate decisions for ourselves even though at times we know that that decision would just bring us misery and pain. **We STILL insist and justify our decision.**

BUT to deny ourselves means TO RENOUNCE our claim to ourselves ---- including our desires, ambitions, dreams, our personal goals AND TO SUBMIT to Christ as His slave because it is a DENIAL of autonomy and self-sufficiency.

SLIDE: Paul exhorts us in **1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a**, "You do NOT belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price."

So, Scripture reminds us that to FOLLOW Jesus means MORE than just identifying yourself as a Christ-follower. **It means** TOTAL submission to His plans and desires for your life. **He must make those ultimate decisions** when the great issues of your life hang in the balance.

This is what Jesus means by, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves...” ----- “We have to deny our self-sufficiency, **deny our autonomy** thinking that we know better than God and run everything to suit ourselves.

The **SECOND** requirement immediately follows, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and TAKE UP THEIR CROSS.”

The image here of taking up a cross and following Jesus derives from the Roman custom of making condemned persons carry their crossbar to the place of execution. **It pictures a procession of the condemned** and implies that one lives knowing that “Life in this world is already finished.”

This is an incredibly powerful symbol or image in a world where criminals and rebels could regularly be seen dying on crosses. **The disciples had to know,** with all the opposition to Jesus by the Sanhedrin and officials, that this was also a real possibility for them.

In the Roman world it was common for the condemned criminal to carry his own cross to the place of execution, so this is a suitable analogy. **To bear the cross** means that disciples imitate Jesus and WILLINGLY subject themselves to SHAME and the howling mob to follow God’s will.

To bear it recognizes that it is NOT foolishness BUT the power of God for salvation, and as that as the cross turns out to be the glory of Christ, so it is the glory of Christians.

So, to bear the cross means that we must PUT TO DEATH self-centred purposes and events in our experience which humbles us, expose us, offend our pride and shame us. **It is NOT so much about martyrdom** BUT rather a lifetime of sacrificial living **as Luke says**, “Take up your cross DAILY.”

So, How do you tend to react when harsh words are employed against you? **How do you respond when someone ridicule you because of your faith?** Has someone hurt you recently? **Are you**, or were you, tempted to respond with bitterness and anger?

In these painful experiences, God is not only calling you DENY yourself, BUT also to ACTIVELY take up your cross daily. **He calls you to reflect the light of His character** and He calls you to suffer in ways that can only be explained by His presence and power in your life. Jesus said it this way, “That they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).”

So, when you are exposed or offended and shamed by doing the right thing don't allow yourself to begin to think that you are in the centre of your universe. **REMEMBER**, that your life NO longer belongs to you **and you have been chosen to live for the glory of Jesus Christ**, and when you do, you will experience tremendous personal joy and contentment that are NOT possible any other way.

The world says, “Get angry, get even, offend in turn and get upset about it,” **BUT the word of Christ is**, “If you're going to be My disciple, **DENY yourself**, and take up your cross.”

And then, the **THIRD** requirement is, “FOLLOW ME.” **And what it really means is** “OBEY ME.” A person who does NOT have any personal relationship with Christ does NOT understand what OBEDIENCE means. **In fact,** it is just natural for him/her to disobey and rebel what God says. BUT for the Christians obedience is the name of the game.

Obedience is NOT something we do to earn our salvation BUT rather a joyful and willing response to the salvation that God has bestowed upon us THROUGH Jesus Christ by receiving His grace, His finished work on the cross.

John says in Chapter 14:15, “If you love Me, obey My commandments.” **And in 1 John 4:19 it says,** “We love because He first loved us.”

In other words, our obedience to God is our RESPONSIVE LOVE for ALL that He has done for us. **His amazing grace** and His forgiveness and mercy that He has shown to us.

Now, we can say boldly that Christ is the most important being in our lives. **Now we see clearly like clear waters** that the passion of profitable life is to JOYFULLY display the greatness and excellence of Christ by the way we live our lives.

And with John Piper we can confess together with him as well that life is given to us so that we can use it to make much more of Christ. **Possessions** are given to us so that by the way we use them, we can show that they are NOT our treasure, BUT Christ is our treasure. **Money** is given to us so that we will use it in a way that shows money is not treasure, BUT Christ is our treasure.

Our Lord is NOT talking about perfection as a disciple. He is simply telling us what discipleship means, and what it involves. **And it involves FOLLOWING Him,** it involves OBEYING Him joyfully and willingly.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asks, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?’”

So, discipleship involves OBEDIENCE. It means choosing to do or say what Jesus commands us to do or say, what He Himself did, and looking to Him for the power to carry it through. **This is what FOLLOWING Him means** and it is what it meant to the disciples.

This is what Christianity is all about. The Christian life is FOLLOWING Jesus, doing what He says and do. **As someone has greatly said,** “The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: Feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as He really is.

In the original Greek, verse 34 is stated in the present, continuous tense. In other words, keep on denying yourself, keep on taking up your cross, and keep on following Christ.

This is NOT just a one-time event or a decision for a moment BUT rather a way of life, a lifestyle as long as we live. **This is what it means to be a disciple.** Discipleship is denying your right to yourself, and taking up the cross whatever shame and humiliation may come our way **and following Christ,** obeying Him, doing what He says to do, looking to Him for the power through His Holy Spirit.

SLIDE:

**3. CONSEQUENCES OF TRUE or FALSE
DISCIPLESHIP (8:35-38)**

A. Gaining or losing one's life/soul (8:35-37)

“35For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the Gospel will save it. **36**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? **37**Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

I'm sure you will agree with me that deep down within our innermost being, **there is a hunger for a purpose driven life** and most of us desire to find it to the full degree of what it was created to be. **This is exactly what Jesus is talking about.**

In John 10:10b Jesus said, “I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.”

But there are TWO attitudes toward life how we might be able to acquire it. **And unfortunately,** you can have only one or the other. The KEY is your own **PRORITIES.**

Jesus uses the language of personal desire or choices (WANTS) to make His point. And there are CHOICES that have to be made.

The CONTRAST is crystal clear: Earthly pursuits vs. Eternal life. **The entire tone of the verse is eschatological,** and the play on words between the word “SAVE” and “LOSE” yields the contrast between seeking to “PRESERVE” the earthly heritage YET IN

FACT actually “DESTROYING” that life and losing it forever.

And sadly, many people are living that way today INCLUDING those people who claim close association with Jesus, professing that they are Christians and YET living a life full of themselves. **And many of them are living a Christ-LESS life** and even a Christ-LESS marriage.

I think this pandemic has really REVEALED the true condition of our hearts. **This pandemic** has either shaped and moulded us in terms of our faith and our love for Jesus **OR** it has EXPOSED our hearts that as we examine it, it was the same scenario found in **John 6:66** that many of Jesus’s disciples TURNED AWAY and DESERTED Him.

And Jesus says that there are ONLY TWO results which can follow. If you try to set on SELF-PRESEVATION mode, if you cling to it and get all you can for yourself, **DEFINITELY**, Jesus says, YOU WILL LOSE IT!

Our life is NOT our own. It belongs to God and He has the right to take anytime He chooses. Our lives belong to God, and He decides what life is for. **And if life is NOT spent for the glory of God and His kingdom THEN,** it is WASTED LIFE. **You will find that all of the life you tried to grasp has slipped through your fingers,** and you have actually ended up with a handful of ashes and cobwebs, HOLLOW and EMPTY.

BUT LOSE your life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel Jesus says, give yourself away in the cause of Christ, giving up your right to SELF-SUFFICIENCY, taking

up your cross and FOLLOW Jesus, and ABSOLUTELY, you will save it.

You will NOT waste it, BUT you will save it. You will find your life in the fountain of His joy, you will experience satisfaction and contentment THAT EVEN THOUGH you may NOT have all the things others have, your life will be rich and rewarding and satisfying.

And then verse 36-37 says, “³⁶What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

This is a very profound, heart-confronting question that hangs over our whole generation. **What good is it to get all the things you wanted,** and have nothing with which to enjoy them, having lost your life in the process?

If you are going to invest time, and money working all through your life to make sure you are able to enjoy your retirement when you are through, but sustain a terminal illness or severe injury what good is it there to enjoy?

SLIDE: James the brother of Jesus, put it like this:
“13 Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone. 15 What you ought to say is, “If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.” 16 Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.”

And many times, this is our problem. **We are so EARTHBOUND.** But what profit is to gain the whole world YET forfeit your soul, THAT IS, to lose your relationship with the Creator God?

The ANSWER is, one would be left with NOTHING, since the present world is passing away. And once you have lost your life/soul, WHAT COULD YOU PAY TO BUY IT BACK?

The ANSWER to the rhetorical question is "NOTHING AT ALL." This is why Jesus asks, "What would it profit a man, to GAIN the whole world and lose his life? What can a man give in return for his life?

I read one article about an archaeologists who discovered the tomb of Charlemagne, (the) great 8th- and 9th-century king and emperor of France. When the tomb was opened, after being closed for centuries, the men who entered it found something amazing. They found certain treasures of the kingdom, of course. **But in the center of the large vault** was a throne, and seated on the throne was the skeleton of Charlemagne, with an open Bible on his lap, and a bony finger pointing at the words, "**For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?**"

What a PROFOUND lesson from history we can learn. **Jesus not only asks this question**, but He also reminds us that there is NO way we can cheat OR cut corners. **He says that not only is it worth it to gamble**, but also that it is impossible to deceive:

SLIDE:

B. Being unashamed or ashamed of the Son of Man's coming (8:38)

“38If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels.”

Our last and final verse PROVIDES another consequence of true or false discipleship, now couched in the Middle Eastern values of honour and shame.

To be “ASHAMED OF ME AND MY WORDS” is parallel to “Saving one's life” by repudiating Jesus and the gospel. **Those who refuse to identify with Jesus in His shameful death in the present earthly realm** will experience the same rejection by the Son of Man when He comes to consummate His reign.

And what our Lord is talking about here is a settled way of life which outwardly expresses conformity to Christian truth, BUT inwardly follows and conforms to the values of the world.

There is NO middle ground when it comes to Jesus Christ. Just like playing it safe. **SLIDE: There is no such thing as such.** Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30**, “Anyone who isn't with Me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with Me is actually working against Me.”

SLIDE: Another verse for us to reflect: “²² On judgment day **many** will say to Me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your

name.’ ²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from Me, you who break God’s laws.’ **Matthew 7:22-23**

So, here’s the ANSWER to the question we asked at the beginning: CAN A PERSON BE A CHRISTIAN, AND NOT A DISCIPLE? **Well**, we can come to Jesus, **and ALL who come to Christ are given life**, if we mean it, **at the end of the day**, He sees our hearts.

BUT it is very clear in our lesson today that UNLESS you take the work of discipleship, this life is given in vain. **ONLY those who are disciples ENTER** into the joy of ETERNAL LIFE.

We all have failed God in terms of what He requires of us in terms of discipleship **and it’s true to say** that there is much of failure. **And God in His mercy has made provision for failure in our lives.** But God is talking about the condition of our hearts.

What do you really want in your life? Do you want to invest it on something that will last forever **OR** Do you just want to live it for yourself? You must decide now for you do not know what tomorrow brings.

When we do, what He wants from us is genuine repentance. Acknowledge our failures and sin, **and receive His forgiveness** and grace through His Son Jesus Christ believing in His finished work on the cross. **Let’s come in humility** and submit once again our lives to Him.

