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Following Jesus Means... Consecration

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TEXT: Mark 8:27-38 (ESV)

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

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. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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."

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. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? 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."

Dear friends,

A number of churches have as their mission statement the following words: "Our mission is to make irreligious people into devoted followers of Christ." That's a good statement, isn't it? But what does it mean to be a devoted follower of Christ? What does that look like in your mind? There are a variety of answers people have given to that question; things like: be a regular churchgoer, worship, be a giver, read and get to know your Bible, do nice things for others. All these activities are good things. But I wonder, do they really get at the heart of being a devoted follower of Jesus? So, for my next few messages, we're going to take a look at how Jesus answers that question. So, let's get started.

In today's text in Mark's gospel, we find Jesus with his disciples in Caesarea Philippi, which is up north of Galilee. They had been with Jesus for quite some time and seen him do amazing miracles and teach with authority. Peter and the others had to have been quite excited about Jesus after all they had observed. He had developed quite a following besides, among the people, everywhere he went, crowds enthusiastically came to him. So, Jesus asked his disciples up in Caesarea Philippi, "Who does the public think I am?" The disciples answered, "They think you're a prophet of some sort, like John the Baptist or Elijah." Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up for the other disciples, and he had the right words. He said, "You are the Christ, which means the Messiah that Israel had longed for, the king." And Jesus, interestingly, said, "Don't tell anyone," at least not yet. But then what follows in this conversation, we see that Peter failed to fully understand Jesus and his kingship. He was raised, you see, to believe that the Christ, the Messiah, would be this mighty king who would set his people free from Roman oppression and establish Israel as a world power. Those were the expectations he'd been taught from childhood. So, when Jesus announced, "I'm going to suffer and be rejected by the religious establishment and killed and then rise again," Peter was quite taken aback by these words of Jesus. In fact, he came unglued, started rebuking Jesus, shut him down, shut him up, arguing that Jesus couldn't be right about this. This was ridiculous thinking. That's not the way kings are to be: suffering and dying. "No, no, no, Jesus." Let's not be too hard on Peter, though. I confess there are plenty of things Jesus says that I don't want to hear either as a sinful, self-centered person. Well, Jesus came down pretty hard on Peter. He addressed Peter as "Satan," and he told Peter his thinking was way off from God's thinking. "Get behind me, Satan," he said, "for you're not set in your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Do you get the feeling Jesus is being tempted by Satan, through a friend?

That there's a war going on, we need to remember, and Satan is trying to derail Jesus from accomplishing his salvation mission at the cross. But we see here Jesus wins again. Well, then Jesus goes on to outline for the disciples what it means to follow him as king and to set their minds on the things of God. He begins by making a very challenging statement that must have shaken them a bit, just as it shakes so many today who really give it a hearing. He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Following Jesus seems to involve denying one's self, according to this statement. It's a surrendering of one's will to Jesus. It's putting aside my own selfish interests and desires and goals for Christ and the gospel message. It's submitting to him as my king, giving him my life, and there's no negotiating with him. He calls the shots. We see it also means "taking up a cross," which is a symbol for suffering. That means being prepared to even suffer and die for him and the cause of the gospel – loving him more than life itself.

And then Jesus explains this statement to help them make sense of it. He shows them the big picture in the rest of our passage. He says that to try to secure and save one's life on your own terms is ultimately a great way to lose it and to lose one's life in service to me and the gospel is to actually save it in the end. He talks with them about their souls, he says, "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" What can a man give in return for his soul? So the bottom line is, following Christ, the king, as a disciple, has to do with the precious commodity of your life itself and how you're going to spend it. He's calling for us to consecrate our very lives to him, which means setting yourself apart for his purposes. It's devoting your total life to serving him, it's dethroning yourself and in throne in Jesus Christ. It's actually the complete divestiture of all self-interest, surrendering all of you to him.

And then Jesus goes on to say that those who deny or confess him in this sinful age will be denied or acknowledged by him at the end of the age when he returns for judgment. He expects us to be unashamed of him and his words as consecrated followers; to stand up for him to show up for him and speak up for him all the time, wherever we are. Jesus is drawing a line in the sand and he's saying, "Cross it, if you want to be a follower of mine." Following the one who went to the cross for us to rescue us from sin and death and the power of the devil is no small matter. It can involve suffering, inconvenience. But Jesus never said following him would be comfortable and convenient. So, it appears to be more than attending a worship service on Sunday,

reciting a creed, putting some money in the offering plate, listening to a sermon, singing along with everyone else, and then going out the door to pursue your own interests and wants the rest of the week. And it's more than just being nice to others. To come after him, to be a devoted follower, is a way of living, a way of thinking that is different from the thinking of the world. Your life becomes his. As Paul the Apostle said, "It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. He's at the center of my life now, and I'm devoted to serving him as my all in all." So, following Jesus means that playing it safe is really not an option there. There's a cross involved that he says we'll take up when we're with him. Followers are to be willing to show up for him, stand up for him, speak up for him, no matter what the situation or the consequences. He commands as king that kind of thing from those who want to follow him as a devoted follower.

Interestingly, shortly after this uncomfortable conversation Jesus had with his disciples, God spoke to three of them on the Mount of Transfiguration and told them, "Jesus is my beloved son, so listen to him." And his passion prediction played out just as he said, and God raised him up as if to say, "Everything he said about himself and me and living was correct. So by all means, follow him and do what he says, serve him." And those disciples did follow and serve him after Pentecost, literally giving their lives up to bring the gospel of Christ to the world. They were harassed and ridiculed and beaten and whipped and imprisoned and even martyred. But wow, did they make an impact for the kingdom of God! The ancient world was turned upside down as the Church of Christ, empowered by this spirit, grew and made more and more disciples who trusted and served in Jesus Christ.

So, it begs the question. After reading this passage today, we need to ask: when did we start believing that God wants to lead us to safe places, to do easy things? That faithfulness to Jesus is holding the fort? That playing it safe is safe? That the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death? Where in the world did we ever get those ideas? I think this passage for the day helps us. I have to wonder, has Satan gotten his way with us? Has he gotten us off course, like he tried to do in this passage? Perhaps this passage is meant to be a wakeup call for Christ's followers today to say, "Get behind me, Satan. I belong to Jesus and I only want to think the things of God. I want to serve Jesus." I think this passage speaks to today's church, reminding us that we are in a war zone, and there is one who still is working to derail the Church of Jesus Christ and render us harmless in this world. And I think that we, as the Church of Jesus, need to continually be doing an honest inventory and asking ourselves, are we cheapening the gospel by

allowing people to buy in without selling out to Christ? Have we made following Jesus too convenient and too comfortable? Have we given people just enough Jesus not to be bored, but not enough to feel a surge of holy adrenalin that courses through us when we decide to follow him, no matter what, no matter where we are, and no matter when? Have we, as a Church of Christ, been selling Jesus instead of selling out to Jesus, being all in for him and inviting others to join us in that? If we have fallen prey to that kind of thinking, then let us repent right now and ask God to forgive us and set us on the right path again so that we may serve our king faithfully.

And I think this passage speaks to the individual, and I need to ask, how about you? Are you following Jesus, as he describes it in this passage? Have you consecrated your life? Set it apart for Jesus? Are you all in; committed to listening to him and learning the things of God from him and confessing him unashamedly as savior and Lord before others? Are you willing to give up your life, your reputation, your security, your self-interest, and wants to serve him and the cause of the gospel in this world? Because that's exactly what he calls us to. Many people think they're following Jesus. But the reality is that they have simply invited Jesus to follow them. They're still calling the shots, living by their values and priorities, trying to use Jesus to assist them in gaining the whole world for themselves. They call him savior, but they've never surrendered to him as Lord. So, I challenge you to stop and take a look at your life today and ask yourself this question: Who is following whom? Am I following Jesus, or if I turn the gospel upside down by inviting Jesus only to follow me to satisfy my desires? You see, Jesus didn't enter our world and die on a cross to follow us. He came to be our king to lead us to new life. He's a good king. He's the son of God who laid down his life for us to restore us into our relationship with God and make us his own. And God has exalted him and given him all the authority. And we will stand before him in the end. Believe this, friends: Jesus didn't die to keep us safe. He died to make us dangerous for him and the gospel. Faithfulness to him is not holding the fort, it's storming the gates of hell. This is no time for us to be shy about Jesus Christ in our world. It's time to speak up. It's time to quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death. It's time to go all in and all out for our all in all, Jesus Christ – to be devoted followers of Jesus in a world full of people that need to know him and to follow him and have life in him.

Is there someone in your life who needs to hear about Jesus? I imagine there is. Is there someone who needs to experience Christ's love and grace? Someone who needs to be ready for his reappearing when he'll judge the living and the dead? Go. Take the risk

for Jesus. Get the holy adrenaline going again. And remember, as you go, he is with you. He promised that. I want to end this message with a statement from a British evangelist named Henry Varley who stated, "The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the person who was fully and wholly consecrated to him." Let's sing along now with this prayer and consecrate ourselves to serving Christ as devoted followers.

Amen.