

# Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

**Take Up Your Cross**  
**November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**Mark 8:34-38**  
**Rev. Paul Carter**

## **Introduction:**

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 8:34; that’s on page 844 in your pew Bibles. Last week we looked at a really long passage, this week we will look at a very short passage. Jesus has just explained plainly to the disciples that the Messiah must suffer and be rejected, be crucified and on the third day rise again. Peter wasn’t pleased with this declaration and he undertook to rebuke Jesus but Jesus firmly put him in his place. ‘This is how it has to be Peter – the Messiah MUST suffer and be rejected. There is no crown without a cross Peter. Not for me’ and now he says, ‘not for you either’. To be a Christian – to be a little Christ - is to deny yourself, it is to die to the world, it is, as he says here, to take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, starting at verse 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. 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. 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? 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 8:34–38 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The metaphor of “bearing your cross” has been dramatically watered down in our culture.

Nowadays it means, dealing with a difficulty or enduring a challenge. People say, “My speech

impediment or my spouse's illness is my cross to bear". Well that isn't what the expression meant in the first century. D.A. Carson explains:

"To a first century ear, such language was shocking. "To take up your cross" did not mean putting up with a toothache, job loss, or personal disability. Crucifixion was universally viewed as the most barbaric of Roman forms of execution, scarcely to be mentioned in polite company. The condemned criminal "picked up his cross", i.e., picked up the cross-member and carried it to the place of execution. If it was your lot to pick up your cross, there was no hope for you. There was only an ignominious and excruciating death."<sup>1</sup>

So, obviously Jesus intended this language to be heard as a powerful and even shocking metaphor – but of course more than a metaphor. When the disciples finally did see Jesus on the cross they understood that it was a metaphor but also a prediction and a warning. Disciples should not expect to fare better than their master in this world and in fact at least 2 of Jesus' disciples that we know of actually did die by crucifixion – Peter and Andrew. But this metaphor – and more than metaphor – was not just for the 12 disciples. Notice the opening words of the passage:

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. (ESV)

All the commentaries agree that:

"By calling the crowd Jesus indicates that the conditions for following him are relevant for all believers, and not the disciples alone."<sup>2</sup>

So "carrying your cross" is a metaphor – and more than a metaphor – and it applies to everyone who would join this group and count themselves followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore we are very interested to know what this metaphor means. What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?

It may be helpful to begin with what it doesn't mean.

### **What Doesn't It Mean?**

It doesn't mean that we have to repeat the work of Jesus. We don't repeat, we receive. The

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *For The Love Of God Volume One*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), February 5.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 306.

Apostle John summarized the life and work of Jesus saying:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12 ESV)

John says that people became Christians, people became the children of God by RECEIVING JESUS not by repeating the life and death of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross he said:

“It is finished” (John 19:30 ESV)

The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus has done for us what we could never do for ourselves and he has paid for what we have done in his body on the cross. That’s why the Book of Hebrews says:

Therefore let us be grateful for **receiving a kingdom** that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28 ESV)

Do you see that? Christianity is about receiving what Jesus has done and what Jesus has given – as a gift – by faith and giving God thanks as our acceptable worship in response. That is Christianity in a nutshell. We receive – we do not repeat.

So this isn’t Jesus telling his disciples that they will have to EARN their salvation by doing what he is about to do. You don’t need to die a martyr’s death to go to heaven. Peter didn’t EARN his salvation by being crucified – Peter was already saved when he was crucified – that’s why he could endure crucifixion with joy and thanksgiving. He counted his life and his suffering as NOTHING compared to the glories that lay ahead.

So its very important that we know what this doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean that Christians earn their salvation by suffering.

So what does it mean?

## What Does It Mean?

1. **It means embracing the likelihood of suffering**

That's what Jesus is saying. He is saying that if you follow me, if you identify with me, then the world will likely treat you as it treated me. They will likely hate you as they hated me. Jesus said this to his disciples plainly on several occasions.

you will be hated by all for my name's sake. (Matthew 10:22 ESV)

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18–19 ESV)

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

Jesus even told us why this will happen. He said that the world hates me:

hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil. (John 7:7 ESV)

The life and death of Jesus declares that the world is sinful and needs to be saved. Christ on the cross says that sin is serious business and it needs to be dealt with and people don't want to hear that! That's the issue and if you follow me and if you preach that Gospel then people are going to hate you. They're going to hurt you and you're going to suffer.

Secondly, this metaphor means:

## **2. It means embracing the likelihood of rejection**

Obviously the second point flows from the first. The world will hate you and it will force you outside – it will push you to the margins. Do not expect to be a follower of Christ and a cultural insider – that is not the way of Jesus. The Apostle to the Hebrews said:

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 13 Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. (Hebrews 13:12–13 ESV)

Jesus suffered OUTSIDE the gates – he was a cultural outsider! He was pushed out and snuffed out and you should expect no better!

Listen to me friends the call of Christ is a call to go outside – it is a call to rejection. If you follow

Christ you must reject the culture – not in its entirety – but in its essence. The Apostle John said the same. He said:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15 ESV)

Christians don't love the culture – they CAN'T love the culture – and therefore the culture doesn't love them. The culture hates them and pushes them out.

But that's ok because Jesus shows us that rejection here is the path to vindication there. Look at verse 38. Jesus says that everyone will be rejected in one world or the next. He says:

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 ESV)

If you soft pedal the Gospel here in order to be well received by the culture then you will be rejected at the Final Judgment. But if you endure the rejection of the culture in order to stay true to the Word of Christ then you will be vindicated at Final Judgment. So pick your poison. Choose where you will be rejected. The path of Jesus is to be rejected on earth and vindicated in heaven.

R.T. France says:

"His rejection on earth will lead to vindication and glory in heaven, and his followers must be prepared for a parallel experience."<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, this metaphor means:

### **3. It means embracing the likelihood of shame**

Crucifixion was designed to shame the victim. It was engineered to humiliate. The victim was crucified naked. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus was crucified naked – that's why the soldiers were casting lots for his clothes. He died naked. He suffered shame. The King of the Universe –ROBED IN SPLENDOR, ARRAYED IN GLORY – The Omnipotent, All Powerful, Sovereign Lord over all things died naked and humiliated - for you.

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<sup>3</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 343.

It is important that you understand that his humiliation was not accidental or incidental to your salvation. It was intentional and necessary because SIN is occasioned by pride therefore salvation must be accomplished through humiliation. The Apostle Paul says that in Philippians 2. He says:

being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:8–9 ESV)

Jesus went to the very lowest place humanity had to offer – the nakedness and shame of the cross – in order to show us the way back to glory. Reaching up we fell therefore only in meeting Christ in the humiliation of the cross can we be restored.

The call of Gospel is very clear here. If you will join with Christ at the point of his humiliation – if you will confess your sin – if you will wear your sin openly before God at the foot of the cross, confessing your rebellion, OWNING your wickedness and treachery, if you will bow before his judgment and acknowledge him as your rightful Judge and Sovereign — then you will be raised and restored to your original dignity and nature.

Shame now, glory later.

That is the way of the cross.

Fourthly and lastly, this metaphor means:

#### **4. It means embracing the likelihood of death**

Now as I said this is a metaphor, but it is more than a metaphor. So I think we could say at the very least that it will always mean metaphorically dying to self. The Apostle Paul for example said:

I die daily. (1 Corinthians 15:31 KJV)

Obviously he means that metaphorically. He means that everyday, ‘I wake up and I die to my natural ambitions. I die to my natural inclinations. I die to my natural appetites so that I may

follow Jesus.' I die daily – metaphorically speaking.

So it always means that – but sometimes it means more than that and it will likely mean more than that in the future. In 2010 retiring Catholic Cardinal Francis George told a group of pastors:

"I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square."<sup>4</sup>

While I'm sure that Catholic Cardinal Francis George and I would disagree on a great many things, we agree that times are changing. We agree that the culture is returning to its historic opposition and antagonism towards the Christian faith and so we agree that the experience of pastors and people in this culture is about to change dramatically. I am probably younger than the man who succeeded Cardinal Francis George in Chicago so that means that I should expect to die in prison and the men I am mentoring should expect to die as martyrs in the public square.

Have you thought your way through that? Have you translated that into your own context? Because as I said, I don't think is just for pastors – Jesus said this to the CROWD. This is for everybody. You should expect in your lifetime to suffer increasing personal and professional hardship. You should expect to lose clients, friends, tax privileges and promotions and your children should expect to be entirely shut out of the professions and public office and the public square. And your grandchild should expect poverty, persecution, prison and even death.

That is the progression and that is the call of discipleship. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in your grandparents' day:

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."<sup>5</sup>

In some generations that's a metaphor, in some generations it is not. In every generation however this saying – this passage of Scripture - necessarily excludes certain ambitions and aspirations. If the life of the Christian disciple is best compared to the condemnation, rejection, humiliation and execution of a common criminal then obviously certain expectations are LOGICALLY EXCLUDED. I don't think you would have had to make this point in previous generations – I do think you have to make it in ours.

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<sup>4</sup> For full citation see here: <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/tim-drake/the-myth-and-the-reality-of-ill-die-in-my-bed>

<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost Of Discipleship*.

## What It Excludes

First of all, and perhaps most obviously, if following Jesus involves taking up a cross then any expectation of personal prosperity must logically be excluded.

### 1. An expectation of prosperity

If Christianity is fundamentally about carrying a cross –if its about marching towards your own execution – then it is unreasonable to aspire to a life of prosperity and ease along the way. One doesn't generally ask a man carrying a cross towards the site of his own execution what sort of house he aspires to own or where he plans to take his next vacation. A condemned man has no such expectations. He expects to be mocked, beaten, scourged, robbed and then killed. That's what happened to Jesus. They beat him, they mocked him and then they stole his clothes and then killed him. And Jesus says: you should expect no better.

Now that is not to say that you won't get any better. I am not saying that prosperity is impossible – I am saying you have no right to EXPECT IT. I have no right to expect it. There may be brief seasons where you can earn a good living without compromising your Christian faith. I think we are coming to the end of the longest such season in Christian history. I think that is why this teaching us so hard for us. Our parents were able to live really good lives without denying their Christian faith. Our grandparents were able to live really good lives without denying their faith. Our great grandparents were able to live great lives without denying their Christian faith – but that's about as far as it goes. Our great great great grandparents suffered a great deal for their Christian faith. Think of John Bunyan – one of the first Baptist Pastors. He spent 13 years in prison. He lost his business and his wife and children very nearly starved to death. He had to make boot laces in prison to sell so that his family could survive. One of his daughters was blind. Can you imagine having a special needs child at home with your wife while you were in prison for 13 years just for preaching the Gospel? That's how it was just a couple of generations ago, and that's how it will be, the Bible says, increasingly as we approach the end. The Book of Revelation says:

Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the



forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (Revelation 13:16–17 ESV)

We can debate the specific meaning of that language and that symbol but the message is very clear. Unless you are prepared to wholeheartedly identify with the spirit and ideology of the culture – a day will come when you will not be allowed to buy or sell. Christians will be completely shut out of the economy – the Bible predicts that. Therefore it is insane – it is unfaithful to believe that you can take up your cross and follow Jesus and **STILL EXPECT TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE NOW.**

That is just unfaithful. If I may be so blunt, to believe that book is to deny this text. What in the world do you think Jesus means when he says:

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? (Mark 8:35–36 ESV)

The common sense meaning of that verse is that if you try to live your best life now then you will not experience the blessedness of the life to come. Isn't that what this means? Because every generation of faithful Christians has believed that – until ours.

R.T. France – from our grandparents' generation – wrote this:

“To cling to the things of this life, the things which humanity naturally values most, is the way to forfeit *true* life.”<sup>6</sup>

Our grandparents believed that you had to choose! If you held on to your best life now then you lost the blessings of the age to come. But if you could let them go and if you could cling to Christ then you would inherit in Christ all the blessings of God in eternity – that's what every generation of Christians believed – until ours. Are we alone wise? Or are we alone FOOLS!

Listen, if that book is right then this verse is wrong. But if this verse is right then the **EXPECTATION** of prosperity is logically excluded.

The second thing I think we have to make explicit here is that this idea of “carrying your cross”

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<sup>6</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 340.

logically excludes the expectation of popularity.

## **2. An expectation of popularity**

Now, as I've said, we are coming out of a very unusual era. For most of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the values of our culture aligned rather closely with the values of the church. There was significant overlap! In your mother's day and in your grandmothers day the church and the culture believed more or less the same things about marriage, children, life, death, sexuality and morality. There was even a time when being known as a church goer was good for your reputation. It meant that you were stable, moral, upright, serious and reliable and those things were valued. There was even a time when people would pretend to be Christians so as to be well thought of by the culture. There was a time when people would go to church to be seen going to church. But let me tell you something friends, that time has passed. To anyone under the age of 40 in this culture the word "Christian" means basically bigot, homophobe, hater, ignoramus and misogynist. You probably heard about the Governor General Julie Payette's speech just a week or so ago wherein she ridiculed and mocked people of faith who believe that God was somehow involved in the creation of the universe. Can you imagine that happening in your grandmother's generation? Can you imagine the person who represents the Queen – who is supposed to be the Defender of the Christian Faith – mocking people who believe in the Christian faith – can you imagine that happening in this country 50 years ago?

There is no way – there is no way!

But times are changing.

The culture is returning to its customary antagonism towards the Gospel and this time they are beginning at page 1. That's why the whole notion of attractional church is increasingly illogical and unfaithful. Attractional church is basically built upon the idea that if we downplay some of our more distasteful beliefs and if we foreground our more attractive qualities, then a greater number of people will come through the front door. There are still some people who believe that. There was a story this week about the Pastor of the Hillsongs Church in NYC who refused on

television to say what he believed about abortion<sup>7</sup> – just as he had previously refused to say what he believed about sexuality<sup>8</sup>. Now I’m not trying to say that those beliefs are what make you a Christian or not, I’m just saying that there are still people out there who believe that if we hide what we believe on these “extreme issues” then we can still be popular in the culture. But that is a FOOL’S ERRAND! The culture isn’t rejecting our extreme views – they are rejecting our foundational assumptions! It isn’t our politics anymore – they are rejecting us at G1! They are rejecting the very notion of God! They are rejecting the very notion that human beings are subject to the authority of a higher power. The attractional church is like a raft that has jettisoned all of its heavy cargo in hopes of making it through the rapids that are quickly approaching. Not only have they lost all that made them distinctly Christian but they are now starting to realize – too late – that there was never going to be a way through. The church and the culture are on a collision course and it can’t be avoided.

No matter how much doctrine you throw over the side, things are coming to a head.

Because if you identify in any way with the cross of Jesus Christ – you are identifying with the ESSENTIAL SCANDAL of the Gospel. Because make no mistake, they know what that symbol means – even if we have forgotten. It means that God judges sin; either in us or in Christ and that will not stand.

The cross is the scandal. It is an offence. And to take it up is to face that offence and all the fury that will inevitably come.

Therefore popularity is logically excluded. Jesus said:

“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you (Luke 6:26 ESV)

How unfortunate for you! Because if you are well thought of in this world it means that you have jettisoned the Gospel and you’re going to die anyway and you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. You have chosen poorly.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dailywire.com/news/23226/hillsong-pastor-carl-lentz-refuses-call-abortion-paul-bois>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/hillsong-church-gays\\_n\\_6002762](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/hillsong-church-gays_n_6002762)

## **Conclusion:**

Listen my friends, here is what I'm saying. You living your best life now, you having your cake and eating it too was never on the table. Not if this passage means what it says. This passage says you've got to choose. One commentator puts it this way:

“When confronted by the call to discipleship, disciples do not have a “both . . . and” choice — both Christ and their own lives. They stand before an “either . . . or” choice.”<sup>9</sup>

You've got to choose! You can have the world or you can have Christ – but you cannot have both. And I'll tell you something, the longer I live in the world the easier this choice gets. The world has begun to ripen and rot and all of its pleasures are poisoned fruit. And Jesus looks better and better every day.

This isn't really a hard decision. The missionary martyr Jim Elliot said:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

My dear friends, this is WISDOM. This is the path of ABUNDANT AND ETERNAL LIFE and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.

(Levi, the song “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” would be a very natural fit here. “And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace...”)

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<sup>9</sup>James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 258.