

Mark 8:31-38, Colossians 1:9-14

What does it really mean to be a follower of Jesus?  
On a regular day to day level is there a pattern, a model that we can follow?

Jesus had many disciples who had chosen to follow Him and from them he had chosen twelve to be Apostles to be sent out and to preach the Good News of the Kingdom and to heal.

In the first 8 chapters of Mark's Gospel the amazing things that Jesus did raised the question; "Who is Jesus?"

There were various ideas about who Jesus was. John the Baptist recognized that Jesus was, "The Lamb of God".

The crowds came to Jesus because of his healing and his message of hope about the Kingdom of God, "he's a teacher & healer from God."

The Pharisees and Religious leaders could see Jesus had power and was popular but they judged him to be a law breaker + dangerous + they wanted to kill him.

When Jesus asked the twelve the question, "**Who do you say that I am?**"

Peter was the spokesman for the group, "**You are the Christ.**" You are God's anointed King & Saviour.

The 12 were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. It was what they had all come to believe. But this was not to be the text for their preaching missions.

**If they had preached openly that Jesus was the Messiah crowds would have flocked to Jesus, bringing weapons and ready to start an insurrection against Rome.**

That was the last thing that Jesus would want. He now had to prepare his disciples for what was about to happen. They knew he was the Messiah. Now they had to learn what kind of Messiah he was to be. Jesus said:

**"The son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." v31.**

The Jews anticipated that Messiah would be King but hadn't understood that Messiah would also be the Suffering Servant mentioned by Isaiah in the Old Testament.

This section of Mark shows a fundamental break with Jewish expectations of a military Messiah who would conquer and rule through military force.

But it wasn't just the Jews, Peter and the other eleven Apostles were also thinking along the same lines. How shocked Peter must have felt.

He hoped to persuade Jesus out of this path and onto the path to Kingly glory. **"That's not the way, what does Messiah have to do with defeat?"**

What a shock it must have been to hear Jesus say,  
**"Out of my sight, Satan!"**

Jesus had been tempted in the wilderness to abandon God's path of service and sacrifice. Now his own disciple was being used to bring pressure to bear on Him again to abandon His mission to save His people from their sins.

**Jesus had come to be an obedient servant  
This is the model for us too. [Mark 10:45]  
"The Son of man did not come to be served,  
but to serve and  
give his life as a ransom for many."**

Up till now the crowds had been following Jesus wanting to be associated with a famous and successful teacher and healer. Jesus calls the crowds to Him and gives a new and stark challenge

**"If anyone will come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.v34b.**

Crucifixion was what the Romans did to rebels who they took prisoner. Crucifixions were common. People would have seen them.

They knew that a man who took up his cross did not have any more decisions to make. He left his own ambitions and plans behind would not come back. Hearing this, some of those who had chosen to follow Jesus turned back, and went home. The cross was too horrible.

**This was not what they had come looking for.**

The twelve continued to follow. This is the first of four times in Mark's Gospel where Jesus warns them of what awaits him in Jerusalem. But it was so contrary to all they had learned as faithful Jews hoping for the restoration of the Kingdom.

## Was it another parable?

We see it. The Cross has been at the heart of the Christian Church for almost 2,000 years.

They couldn't understand and they wouldn't understand it fully until after the resurrection.

It needed Jesus, risen from the dead, to appear to them. During 40 days the risen Lord Jesus met them and opened their minds to make sense of it, to fit it all together

What did Jesus mean by saying take up your cross and follow me?

Jesus gave them a clue into the meaning of it [v35]

**"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for me  
and for the gospel will save it."**

What can this mean for 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians?

If we want to hang on to our lives, to stay in control of our own lives, make our own choices, follow our own selfish way we will in the end lose everything. We are not able to keep our life ourselves.

If we entrust our lives to God's safe keeping, walk in His way, live to please Him, put Him at the centre of our life then we are dying to ourselves.

This is what taking up our cross & following our Lord Jesus means [v36].

**"What good is for a man to gain the whole world,  
yet forfeit his soul?"**

Five young missionaries were going on a dangerous mission to establish contact with the Auca Indians of Ecuador. They knew that it was dangerous but after sustained prayer and having made the best preparations they could the five young men set out in a light aircraft. They did make contact with the Auca's Indians but were killed and eaten by them within a few days.

They were conscious of the risk they were taking. To some it would appear foolish. They had understood the essence of being a disciple of Jesus. They had hoped to live and work for God but their great adventure for God led to their deaths. To many it seemed like such a waste of those young lives.

But as the persecuted church around the world has proved, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the spread of the church."

The story of their death inspired many others.....

Christians are at work around the world serving the world's poorest people. In many countries where Christians are persecuted we see them holding onto faith and witnessing to the truth of the Gospel.

Janny and I are supporters of Tearfund which is at work in 49 countries. They work by strengthening and helping local churches to help their communities break free from poverty. Supporters, Tearfund staff and the local partners on the front line are united in compassion following Jesus where the need is greatest.

The essence of taking up our cross is not necessarily suffering but service; allowing Christ's love to flow through us. Not just in the dramatic situations but wherever we find ourselves; loving the Lord our God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves. We have good examples of Christian disciples who give their lives in service for Christ and our neighbour in our church. Church wardens and

Council members take on a heavy responsibility for the life of the church. Cell Group Leaders invest time and love in the care of their Cell Group. Children's Work leaders show their love for the Lord our God in their care for our young church. The beamers and coffee makers, Those who care for the church building the welcomers and all who serve are doing Christ's work.

All of us who demonstrate a Christian character in the workplace, the neighbourhood, the school are allowing Christ's love to flow through us.

Husbands who care for their wives and wives who care for their husbands are allowing Christ's love to flow through them.

Parents learn this self-giving love when we readily become the carer's, loving and serving those little people the Lord has entrusted to us.

Those who put Jesus and the gospel first have a life that is safe, hidden with God.

If we give up our self-centred life of rebellion against God we will gain the life of the Kingdom of God the life of the Age to come.

The disciples didn't understand it all but they kept following because they knew the man. They trusted Jesus. Often we will not understand.

Let's keep on learning to trust Him and live our lives in obedience to Him.

### Prayer

Lord of the harvest, by your Spirit may we sow;  
Thoughtfulness so that the harvest may be love;  
Sow Forgiveness, so that harvest may be peace;  
Sow Understanding so the harvest may be patience;  
Sow Persistence, for a harvest of faithfulness; and  
Sow discipline, so we may reap self-control. Amen.