

最宝贵的邀请——马可福音 8:34-38

The Most Precious Invitation—Mark 8:34-38

Introduction & Outline

- Scripture reading: Mark 8:27-38; Hebrews 10:26-31; 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Mark 8:34-38

34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35 For whoever wishes to 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 will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

- The invitation of the gospel. We often hear this at evangelistic meetings: “We invite you to accept this gospel message, raise your hands, and come to the stage to show that you are willing to accept the Lord Jesus into your heart and let Him be your Savior. If you accept this invitation, you can become a disciple of Jesus today and receive the abundant life from Him.” Today’s Scripture is the original gospel invitation given by Jesus Himself to everyone.
- People’s invitation sometimes gives the impression that God wants Christians to have a healthy, wealthy, successful, and smooth life right now; but Jesus’ invitation is for Christians to embrace a life of lowest humility, self-denial, and cross-bearing. A life that is willing to pay the greatest price for Jesus and endure the greatest suffering for the gospel at any time.
- Outline:
 - Title: The Most Precious Invitation
 - 1. Summons of the Gospel Invitation (v.34a)
 - 2. Substance of the Gospel Invitation (v.34b)
 - 3. Sensibleness of Accepting the Invitation (v.35)
 - 4. Stupidity of Rejecting the Invitation (vv.36-38)

Summons of the Gospel Invitation (v.34a)

- “And”: Closely connected with the preceding text. Why did Jesus give such an invitation here? Because the disciples had just completely reversed the meaning of following Jesus! Jesus said: I am going to suffer and be killed; Peter said: God forbid it! They thought Christ could ascend directly to the throne without crucifixion; therefore, as followers of Christ, they believed that they also could directly enter the prosperous kingdom of Christ without having to completely deny themselves.
- “Summoned the crowd with His disciples”: Typically, gospel invitation is given to those who have not yet accepted the invitation. Rarely do we invite those who have already accepted it. Here, Jesus invited the crowd and the disciples alike.

- “If anyone wishes to come after Me”: For the disciples already following Jesus, this invitation asks for a renewed commitment and perseverance. For those who have not yet followed Jesus, this is undoubtedly the most precious invitation they have ever heard: to follow the Lord of glory and gain eternal life! This is the deepest desire of every living soul.

【Truth】 Everyone is following something. Every decision you make in life is to follow something. In the end, you will find all these things are meaningless and cannot fill the huge hole in your soul. Only God Himself, the Creator of your soul, can fill this hole by His saving grace. Aware or not, everyone is constantly following something in his life. Every decision, each word, each action, all bear witness to what one follows in his heart.

Substance of the Gospel Invitation (v.34b)

- “Must.....”: Simply wanting to follow Jesus is not enough. Many followers later stopped following Him (see John 6:66). Because they don’t understand what it means to follow Jesus, and their hearts are following something else. Jesus says following Him means these three things: denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus.
- “Deny himself”: The original text of “deny” means “disown/refusing to acknowledge”. This is the word used to describe Peter denying the Lord three times. To deny yourself is to disown yourself, to have nothing to do with yourself.

【Think】 How did Peter deny Jesus? He wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Jesus’ words and deeds, Jesus’ past, presence, and future, Jesus’ plans and desires, all have nothing to do with him. To deny yourself is to do to yourself what Peter did to Jesus: to renounce yourself, no longer taking yourself seriously, and all your dreams and goals are of no importance and irrelevant to you. The only thing relevant to you is what Jesus wants.

【Key Point】 The key to self-denial is the right mindset. The self-denial mindset will inevitably produce corresponding speech and action.

【Application】 The self-denial mindset may make you care less about your birthday, stop looking for yourself in a group photo, make some big changes to how you spend your money, and go to gym less often, or at least have a different motive for going to gym.

One pastor said that self-denial means “*quit regarding self-realization as the highest goal. ... Disciples must stop pursuing their own interests nor making their own lives their highest concern. **He must turn from the self-centered idolatry.***” This is not just the *cost* of following Jesus; it *is* following Jesus. The essence of following Jesus is to deny yourself.

- “take up his cross”: This is the first mention of the cross in the gospel account, and very likely the first time the disciples heard this word from Jesus. They didn’t even know that Jesus was going to the cross, and now they’re told that they must take up their own cross.

【Background】 The crucifixion was the most cruel death penalty known to people at that time. The Roman Empire often used it to execute the worst criminals. The cross was invented to prolong the process of dying. The prisoners would struggle in agony for days before dying, the whole process being in broad daylight, in full view of the public. To the listeners then, the cross meant not only death but also extreme pain and humiliation. It was the most painful and humiliating way of death known to the then world.

【Meaning】 It entails the self-denial mindset, but this is no simple repetition. The cross is the extent to which Christians are to deny themselves. When the cost of following Jesus is no longer just giving some time and money to church ministry, but when following Jesus brings the most severe persecution, suffering, and even a painful crucifixion, then what does it mean to deny yourself? It means to take up your cross literally. It means to suffer the most severe suffering for the Lord.

1 Peter 4:1-2 “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”

- “Follow me”: This is the whole point of self-denial and cross-bearing. The point of self-denial is not about self, and the point of cross-bearing is not about suffering. The whole point of self-denial and cross-bearing is to follow Jesus. Only with complete self-denial and readiness to suffer can one truly live a life of following Jesus. Self-denial and suffering would mean nothing if one doesn’t follow Jesus.

【Comparison】 Buddhism also talks about self-denial and suffering; but without the pursuit of Jesus, it is impossible to really deny yourself. You can forsake everything on the outside, but in the end, you’re only to be left with your huge arrogant ego. Christians deny themselves and suffer so as to follow Jesus, for Jesus alone can give us real life!

【Grammar Insight】 “Follow” in the original text is in the present tense, indicating a continuous effort throughout a Christian’s life. There’s no holiday break in following Jesus. The entire Christian life can be summed up in these two words: follow Jesus. Not superficial obedience, but surrendering your whole person to Jesus from the heart. You fix it in your heart that all Jesus’ commands and guidance are the best, and then live out this conviction.

【Truth Reminder】 It’s not to earn your salvation by doing the above things; rather, this is what a truly saved life looks like. If you get the order reversed and think you have to do these things by yourself to be saved, then you will never be able to do it and you will never be saved. Only by getting the order right and realizing the preciousness of Jesus’ salvation can you be able to deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus from your heart.

Sensibleness of Accepting the Invitation (v.35)

- “For.....”: This sentence means: If you think the cost of following me is too high, you need to know that the cost of not following me is even higher. The cost of following me is high, the gain is even higher. Follow me, and you gain eternal life; not follow me, and you lose your life eternally. There are only two choices for everyone, and the only sensible choice is to follow Jesus.

【Examples】 The rich young ruler had everything in this earthly life, but “he was saddened, and he went away grieving” (Mark 10:22); Stephen lost his life for Jesus, and he “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

【The Paradox of Life】 The life lost for Jesus is the bodily life; the life saved by Jesus is the spiritual life—the real life! Life is a multi-meaning word! Believing in the Lord and being saved is the beginning of real spiritual life. But even Christians can have moments of lifelessness! Whenever you aren’t denying yourself to follow Jesus, you fall into a lifeless state!

Colossians 3:4 “When Christ, who is our life,

Philippians 1:21 “For to me, to live is Christ

Stupidity of Rejecting the Invitation (vv.36-38)

- “what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”: Soul is the same word as life in the previous verse. The answer is obvious: life is priceless. However, the vast majority of people in the world still reject Jesus’ invitation and forfeit eternal life. Isn’t that stupid? That’s what sin nature does to people. The fallen sin nature makes it impossible for man to make the right choice even for such a simple question. Only God can break the bondage of fallen sin nature and enable a person to deal rightly with this most basic reality.
- “ashamed”: We are ashamed of Jesus and His Word when we don’t want others to know our identity as believers in Jesus, when we don’t want people to see our love for Jesus and desire to live according to His Word, when we don’t want to deny ourselves to love His people or to share the gospel. To not be ashamed of Jesus is to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus, even when it costs our lives.

Summary

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