

"Lent Reminds Us What Real Life Is All About"

Mark 8:31-38 – February 25, 2024

Do you worry, or as some are now calling it, “analyze” things every day? I’m going to give you a list of 10 things, keep track of how many are your worries.

- 1) “How will I get to work, or the kids off to school on time?”
- 2) “How will I get all my work done today?”
- 3) “How am I going to get to all my appointments this week?”
- 4) “When will I go grocery shopping for this week’s meals?”
- 5) “What are we having for supper?”
- 6) “Am I feeling healthy? For how long?”
- 7) “Am I feeling not so healthy? For how much longer?”
- 8) “What’s that sound the car is making?”
- 9) “What are the kids doing?”
- 10) “How long will it take me to fall asleep after I say my prayers?”

Yes, we worry about things like that. It’s just a matter of which day of the week. The bigger question: What can take those worries away?

God's Word gives us an antidote for worries. By the end of today’s message, my prayer is that you realize:

“LENT REMINDS US WHAT REAL LIFE IS ALL ABOUT.”

- 1) It reminds us that **Christian faith is trusting in Christ’s cross.**
- 2) It reminds us that **Christian life is taking up Christ’s cross.**

In the end, that’s the antidote for worries.

(1) Christian faith is trusting in Christ’s cross

There are times when someone says something to us that we don't necessarily like what they had to say. That was the case with Jesus’ disciples. Jesus knew what he was facing. He was beginning a year-long march to his death in Jerusalem, 100 miles to the south. Today’s lesson is the disturbing things he told his disciples. He told them he would suffer. He would be rejected. He would be put to death. And he would rise from the grave. Talk about raining on their parade! All they heard was

suffer, rejected and killed. They missed the part about rising in 3 days.

That’s clear from what Peter did next: **he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke or scold him** because this isn't what the Savior should be saying. Talk about conquering enemies and performing miracles. Don't talk about suffering and dying.

Jesus needs to remind Peter that besides being selfish, he was interfering in God’s plan. To carry out God's plan to rescue sinners, Jesus had to suffer and die. Jesus knew exactly who was behind Peter's words! **That’s why he rebuked Peter: “Get behind me, Satan!”**

We’d rather not admit it, but we're Peter sometimes. His idea of following Jesus is what’s called a “*theology of glory.*” As Peter saw it, as long as we trust Christ, God guarantees that everything else will go smoothly for us: the money will be good, our relationships won't get too stressed, our health will be fine, and things will work out for us.

That's not the way life works. Our money does get tight. Our relationships do get too stressed. We lose our health. Things are caving in on us! And then we wonder: “*What went wrong? Where’s Jesus? Doesn't God love me anymore?*”

And that’s what brings us to true Christian theology: not Peter's “*theology of glory,*” but a “*theology of the cross.*” That's why Jesus suffered floggings ... the punishment for your worries. That's why Jesus suffered rejection... the punishment for your anxieties. That's why Jesus stayed on the cross and died, and went to hell and back ... to take away your sins, all of them.

That's the “*theology of the cross.*” And Lent reminds us: *Christian faith is trusting in Christ's cross.*

(2) Christian life is taking up Christ’s Cross

If I stopped here, you’d only have half the message God intends. Not only does Jesus say that he will

take up his cross, he insists that we take up our own cross, as well. Let's listen in because what Jesus was about to say was so important he wanted his disciples and the crowd to hear it: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."**

That isn't the most inviting invitation, is it? Deny myself? Pick up my own cross? Carry my own cross? That's what's involved in following Jesus? When someone tries to sell you something, they usually paint as pretty a picture as possible of what they want you to buy. You don't tell someone who wants to buy your car that it doesn't always start, gets poor gas mileage and has tires that are in bad shape. That's no way to sell your car.

When it comes to the Christian faith, there are many who would have you believe that following Christ is a breeze. But Jesus does not picture following him as a walk in the park. What he does say: *"Trust in me and not yourself. Be concerned with me and not with yourself."* Then he goes on: **"For whoever wants to save their life (this life) will lose it (forever and ever), but whoever loses their life (this life) for me and for the gospel will save it (eternally)."**

Just so there is no misunderstanding, Jesus stresses the eternal significance and importance of taking up Christ's cross: **"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"** Yes, he's talking about your eternal soul. Your everlasting salvation is hanging in the balance.

Again, so there is no misunderstanding, Jesus repeats explains it in a different way: **"If 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."**

Let's return list of worries. If you're a student: Do you worry about your grades and not being on the honor roll? Do you worry about completing your homework on time?

If you're a worker: Do you worry about not moving up at your job? Do you worry about getting all your work done, or losing your job? To you Jesus says: **"Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me."**

- *"Don't worry about your grades or your wages; focus on serving me."*
- *"Don't agonize about getting your work done. I created time. Won't I give you the amount I choose and what you need?"* And with each passing day, he says: *"It is through my cross you most certainly have a place next to me in glory."*

Do relationships worry you? Will the other kids quit picking on me? Will that special someone pay attention to me? Will my boss, or co-worker, stop irritating me? Will our marriage last? Will our kids behave themselves, no matter how old they are? To you Jesus says: **"Deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me."**

- *"Don't worry about your relationship with others; count on your relationship with me!"*
- *"Don't worry about pleasing others; concentrate on pleasing me!"*
- *"If you have any concerns over a relationship, come to me in prayer!"* And with each passing relationship, he says: *"It is through my cross you most certainly are related to me forever."*

Lent Reminds Us What Real Life Is All About. Your Christian *faith* is *trusting in* Christ's cross. Your Christian *life* is *taking up* Christ's cross. And when you *trust in* and *take up* Christ's cross ... your worries shrink and disappear.