A Profitable Loss

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[0:00] Chapter 8, when you lose something, it's painful. When I was nine, I lost my bike.! Actually, it was stolen. And it was not a very good bike.

I think we bought it at an auction. But it was a bike anyway. And it was my bike. And a 14-year-old jerk from the neighborhood that went through the woods, stole it.
And we found him, saw him riding it a couple days later. And my 14-year-old brother and our tough 13-year-old neighbor and I went to the boy's house.
And when we got there, he was alone in the front yard. And he ran into the house. And we ran in after him. And chased him into the bathroom.
And he was trying to hide behind the shower curtain. And they cornered him. I think they roughed him up a little bit. And held him. And I popped him in the eye. And I got my bike and I rode it home.
[1:06] Leave my stuff alone. I hope the statute of limitations has expired on that little event. But either way, losing something is painful.

I heard of a newlywed couple. And one day the groom came home and his bride was crying. And he said, why are you crying? And she said, I made some biscuits. And the dog got them off the table and ate them.
And he said, sweetheart, don't cry. We can get another dog. Loss is painful. I want to talk to you about a different kind of loss.
Mark chapter 8, beginning in verse 34. It says this. And calling the crowd to him.
Speaking of Christ. 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.
[2:08] For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels 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 my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of him will be the son of man also be ashamed.
When he comes to the glory of his father and the holy angels. Now I want you to remember the context of our passage. We've been looking at the last half of Mark chapter 8 as we lead into Mark chapter 9.
Two weeks ago we looked at Peter's very powerful confession that Jesus Christ, when Christ asked him, Who do people say that I am? And they mentioned a few things. And then they said, Who do you say I am?
And Peter said, You are the Christ, Son of the living God. And it was a powerful statement to say. And on that note, Jesus told them the difficulty that was coming, that was ahead, that he would suffer.
[3:18] And that he would be rejected by religious leaders and they would be crucified and then he would rise again. When he said that, Peter rose up and in his own words said, I'm not going to dare let that happen.

And Jesus said that his words were of the devil. And now he talks about not what he will go through, but what those who follow Christ must be willing to do.
He speaks to all of us that are Christians. And I believe he speaks to all of us who are considering being Christians, what it means to be a Christian.
Notice that he does not speak just to the disciples. If you look back at verse 34, it says that he called the crowd to him with his disciples.
So in other words, this is not just for the inner 12 here. It's for all of us. If we're to follow Christ, we must first deny ourselves.

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[4:29] And when Jesus uses that word deny ourselves, it literally means to disown completely. What he's saying is that we must do away with what we think is best for us and do what he knows is best for us.

That whatever we feel like we have a right to claim, we submit that to Christ. But whatever we feel like we have a right to aspire to be, we submit that to Christ.
Whatever our personal goals are, we lay that at his feet. We're not in charge.
We're not self-sufficient. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 5, verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.
In other words, when we realize that we are spiritually bankrupt without Christ, we come humbly to Christ.
[5:42] And the reality is for true change to come, there has to be a breaking point. There has to be a point when we say no to ourselves.

And that's not easy. I believe he explains it this way in verse 35. 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.
Imagine someone comes to you with a very unique offer. He said, I've got an offer for you. If you'll give me something, I will give you $100 million.
I have your attention. He said, I'll give you basically the whole world. If you'll give me a little finger on your hand.
If you take that off and give that to me. And I'll give you an army. A lot of you are laying your hands out now. Hands are up everywhere.
[7:02] Most would say yes. Go ahead. What about your hands? What about both hands?

What about your eyes? What about your eyes? What about both eyes? What about your hearing? I mean, I don't know where you are on the spectrum. But at some point, if I can't feel it. And I can't see it. And I can't hear it.
Do you think I'm going to give up all that just to gain the whole world? The reality is, folks.
Unless you deny yourself and give up control of your life, you are giving up. You are giving up far more than all of these things.
[8:16] And receiving far less than the best this world has on earth. Your soul is worth more than your hands.

Your soul is eternal. Your soul is worth more than your eyes. Your soul is everlasting.
Your soul is worth more than your ears. Your soul is the dwelling place of the Lord. Yet unless you deny yourself, say no to you, you're giving your soul up in exchange for the world.
We must deny ourselves. Then he says something about it. We must also take up the cross.
Now, what does that mean? It's a clear physical picture of what it means. It literally means to shoulder one's stake. Now, we know that Jesus had to carry his own cross as far as he could.
[9:25] And the reality is, he could not carry it all the way to Calvary. I believe because of the beating that he had taken before he ever got the cross.

Historians say that it's very possible that the flogging that he received was usually a punishable option instead of crucifixion.
And we have the idea that they were limited to whipping a man 40 times with a cat of nine tails. That's a leather strap that has nine pieces coming out from it. Nine leather straps with bone or metal or something tied into it so that it would grip the flesh.
And the thought is that they limited that to 40. And so the reality was, if you whipped him more than 40, then it would be punishable to you the same thing.
[10:35] So you get your best buddy who's the countenance to count it. And you stop at 39. That was common. But that's a Jewish rule.

Not a Roman rule. The Romans can beat you along their way. And typically they did that instead of crucifying someone when they deemed that punishable.
Because that way you walk around wounded by the Roman Empire and you teach other people not to mess with the Roman Empire. But some believe that it could have been there.
They were unclear on what they wanted to do. But they flogged Jesus first. And then had him carry his cross. And then crucify him.
When someone carried the cross, although most of what we see traditionally has been Christ carrying the whole cross, the trend was that they carried the cross beam called the patella.

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[11:47] That they would tie that cross beam across their shoulders to both wrists. And they would carry that cross beam until they got to the stipe that was in the ground where it was tied on.

And the man was on. That's the idea of this statement. And Christ uses this statement to speak to our need to take up the spiritual responsibility to live for Christ unashamedly and without compromise.
Now, in the same passage, in the parallel passage in Luke chapter 9 verse 23, the word daily is used. Therefore, this is not a one-time decision.
Now, I want to be clear when I say this. That everything for Christ starts with a one-time decision. There has to be a point in your life when you wake up to the reality that you need to commit your life to Christ.
Give it over to him. Deny yourself and give him your life. And to do that with boldness. That's what it means to be saved.
[13:04] That's what it means. That's not our terminology. That's John speaking of that. Salvation. It means to commit our life to Christ. And if there's never been a time in your life when you have asked the Lord Jesus to forgive you of your sins, to come into your life, and to save you, I want you to know that is the initial step to the Christian life.

Joining the church, don't do it. Having family that's been faithful in the church, don't do it. Having Bible knowledge does not do it. It's a commitment to Christ.
There's no rite of passage that we do. No ceremony. No work class. No baptism. Nothing takes the place of surrendering your life to Christ personally.
It begins with a one-time deal. But it's not just a one-time deal. It's daily. It's daily giving yourself back to Christ.
It does not change that commitment of a Christian. You remain a Christian for all of eternity. You cannot fall out of the hand of the Father.
[14:15] No one can snatch you out of the hand of the Father. Your salvation is based upon the cross of Christ, not upon your eyes. And once you surrender your life to the cross, you're there.

But if you're a Christian, and it's real, then we commit ourselves to strive against the difficulty of living for the Lord in a wicked world.
And we do all that we can to live for Christ with whatever we deal with. Now, some people believe that when it talks about taking up the cross, that it means sickness or it means personal hardship. It's that whatever you bear. And the reality is, it does include that. That's not just it. But it does include that. The Apostle Paul said that he had a thorn in the flesh, and he prayed repeatedly that God would remove it.
And he never did. That was part of the cross that he had to bear. He didn't take that on. There is a reality to that.
[15:26] But it's not just those things. I'm burdened this morning because there's a pastor that has been prominent in Southern Baptist Convention.

Pastor's in Georgia. His name's Mike Stone. And he has a daughter that has a debilitating disease. She is a beautiful, Sarah is a beautiful 18-year-old.
Just graduated from high school. But could not have been at school many days in the last days because she has spent more time in the hospital than she has outside the hospital.
And excruciating pain. Unbeeding to. Sad situation. Sad situation. And just yesterday I read a post that she's at home now on hospice.
I remember reading Sarah's post when she was able. And saying, may God be glorified in the midst of whatever I have to do.
[16:43] May he get the cross. She has a powerful testimony. And she struggles with its debilitating disease.

Sometimes the ailments in life that we deal with is part of that cross we must bear. It's the things that happen to us.
And how we handle those things. But it's more than that. It's also how we interact with others. If we are ridiculed for being a Christian.
If we are tempted as Christians. If we are unappreciated as Christians living for Christ. Then we strive on for the glory of God.
Now what's the alternative to that? The alternative to that is trying to profit from living for the world. And Christ's response to that is in verse 36 and 37 when he says, For what does it profit a man to

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gain the whole world for for his soul?
[17:51] For what can a man give in return for his soul? Charlemagne was the king and emperor of France in the 8th and 9th century. And it has been said that when archaeologists entered his tomb, they saw a throne surrounded by treasures that had been buried along with him.

But they found the body in a very unique way. There was a throne there. There was a throne there. And seated on that throne was a dead man with a crown around his head.
But when the archaeologists came in and invaded that tomb, the skeleton was just there and that crown had slid down around his skull. But it's also been said that in his lap was an open Bible and his bony finger was pointing to Matthew 16 verse 26.
For what is a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? And what shall a man give in return for his soul? When we live for the world instead of living for Christ in the world, we forfeit the opportunity to walk in the way of God.
We forfeit the opportunity to walk in the fellowship of God, in the will of God. And the world will never satisfy. And the world, even though you may wrap it around your throne in your tomb, will never last.
[19:14] Take up your cross. Date. And the last thing he says is follow Christ. He begins this statement by saying, come after me.

He ends this statement by saying, follow me. It's one and the same. We need to trust Christ enough to follow him. He knows the world we live in. He knows what we face.
In the midst of all of that, we must follow Christ. And following Christ is often misunderstood. Because the word follow there is a Greek present imperative.
In other words, present means it's continuous. It's habitual. It's repeated. Imperative means it's a command. In other words, we are to. It's not a one-time action to just follow Christ.
One day when I was a child. It's to follow Christ. Regularly. And the following that it speaks of is not like walking behind one that is ahead.
[20:16] It is instead accompanied. When a dog heals, he is right beside his master. The master leads the way, but the dog is keeping pace with the master. He don't run ahead of the master.

He don't like behind the master. He heals. He stays beside the master and watches the master lead. So it must be for us to not run ahead of God, to not run behind God, but to walk with God and commit to walk with him.
We must focus our life on pleasing God stride for stride, not tailing behind, not running ahead and asking God to forgive us and bless whatever we're doing, but to walk with the Lord at the pace that he'd have you to walk.
And that takes dedication, and it takes boldness, and it takes an unashamed attitude. It's interesting to me that some people have a hard time living for Christ when other people are watching.
They easily get compromised in certain crowds. And if they get around a crowd that does not honor the Lord, they'll follow that crowd, and they'll do what that crowd does, and they will not honor the Lord in the midst of that.
[21:37] But then there's others who have a hard time living for Christ when no one's looking. They look right, but they're not right. And shamefully, they privately abandon their faithful commitment to Christ when no one's looking.

And when that sinful pattern grows bigger, it's often exposed. And when that sin is exposed, we're shocked. Where in the world did that come from? Well, I'll tell you where it came from.
They didn't see it coming. But whenever shocking sin is discovered, there's already been a pattern of sin that was growing. James 1, 14 and 15 puts it this way.
But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.
And that does not only mean that your heart may stop because of what you do, but it means there may be a death to relationships. There may be a death, an ending to life as you know it.
[22:43] Because now it's discovered. And one of the reasons why, men, I want you to pick up one of those books, and I want you to sign your name to come at 6 or 9, if at all possible, so we can have time together, is so that men don't get caught up in such traps.

That somewhere along the way, somebody can hold somebody accountable and keep us from doing dumb stuff. I don't drop my kids off at school.

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I'll move one in in a couple of weeks anymore. But every time I did, in the last years that I did that, when they got out, and I hope I don't offend anybody. If you do, I apologize.
But before they got out of my car, I'd say nothing stupid. Because it covers a bunch of stuff, you know. I mean, it really does. And if you'll stay away from the stupid stuff in life, you'll be in a whole other shape.
I will be. Now, if that's a bad word at your house, I apologize. Okay. That's kind of stupid, too. But anyway. Let's don't get caught in such traps.
[23:55] James tells us, resist the devil, and he'll flee from you. So whatever it is, whether it's a person that you need to walk away from, whether it's a thing that you need to do away with, whatever it is, resist the devil, and he'll flee from you.

Walk unashamedly with Christ. Christ dealt with it bluntly.
When he says in Mark chapter 8, verse 38, verse 39, for whoever is ashamed of me, for whoever is ashamed of me and 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. What Jesus is saying is that if you're ashamed to follow Christ before others, he gives evidence you don't have a relationship at all.
Now why is there so much compromise in the walk of supposed believers today? Why is that?
[25:25] Why are so many church leaders excusing away the Word of God in order to appease those that do not want to live by the Word of God? Why are so many churches in the world that do not want to live by the Holy Spirit?

Personally. Will not last. My friend, I want you to understand something. We stand on the Word of God. We don't compromise that.
And that's proof that we're true believers. And it's got to show forth in our life. Not just in what we say. It's got to show forth in our life. To deny ourselves. To take up His cross.
Whatever that may mean in our lives. Whether it's a hectic situation at work. Whether it's personal problems that we have. Whether it's people.
Whether it's illnesses. Whether it's tenderness. Whatever it is. Take up that cross. And follow Christ.
Africa is known for their diamond mines.
[27:02] Many have traveled in search of diamonds and left very rich. And generations ago, a man had a farm in Africa and saw all of those coming to Africa for diamonds.

And he wanted in on it. So he sold his farm and took the proceeds to search the country for diamonds.
Spent all he had. Searching for diamonds. To no avail. Broken, desperate. He threw himself into a river and took his own life.
And not long after that, the man who bought his farm was crossing a stream on his farm and saw something shiny. And one of the richest diamond mines in Africa was on that farm.
And the farm that a man had sold and left to go root for diamonds was the one that was the jewel.
[28:11] Don't sell out to serve the gold. You need to look nowhere else to find value than the maker and the keeper of your soul.

And whatever you lose for following Christ, you'll only profit for it. It is a profitable loss.
That is what it is. Every head bowed, every eye closed. I asked you this morning. If you've ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ.
Because I want you to be clear that I never assumed, as I look across this congregation, that all have given their life to Christ. Even if you're a member of this church.
Even if you're in leadership of this church. It is not my job to assume those things. And the greatest burden that I have in ministry is that people that sit under my preaching week after week after week, possibly never know Christ.
[29:31] You've never given your life to Christ. His invitation is open to you today. Today. Say, Lord, whatever I am, I give to you.

And I ask you to forgive me of my sins and to come into my life. And to this day forward, I put my agenda down and I take up your agenda and follow you. If you have done that, but you've never acknowledged that public has been a private thing for you.
I want you to remember what Mark chapter 8 verse 38 says. If you're ashamed to be a follower of Christ, the reality is, he wants to never having a relationship with you.

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Jesus, by his commission and by his example, shows us that the first step is to publicly acknowledge that new baptism. If you've never done that, I encourage you to come. We line that up.
Maybe God's leading you to be a part of Pickens First Baptist Church. This is the place that God would have you serve. It is so easy to tether alongside without any commitment.
[30:46] And the devil loves all that. Now, I'll never ask, personally or corporately, I'll never ask anybody to do anything that God don't need you to do. But the reality is, if God's leading you to be a part of this church, commit your life to go alongside somebody in the earlier worship, made a commitment to serve, said, I love the Lord, live for the Lord, but I want to serve Him.

I need to commit to serve Him. The beauty of the church is that in the church, everyone is served and everyone serves.
So, if you're not a part of Pickens First Baptist Church, and God's leading you to be a part of that, you're not. God's leading you. Or maybe you're here this morning and you need to take up your cross.
Whatever that means, you need to follow Christ. And you need a renewal today in your life.
I told you in this point in the Gospel of Mark, it's kind of the cap of the Gospel of Mark. That the last couple of weeks, and this week, and next week, everything's kind of been leading toward this.
[32:09] And then after this, we lead toward the cross. The reality is, this kind of decision that one who needs Christ makes, or this kind of decision that a Christian makes, is so significant.

It's huge. To deny ourselves and take up the cross and to follow Him. Whatever that means to you, obey God's name.
Heavenly Father, help us to be diligent to honor you with everything that you tell us to do. Right in Jesus' name.
Amen.

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