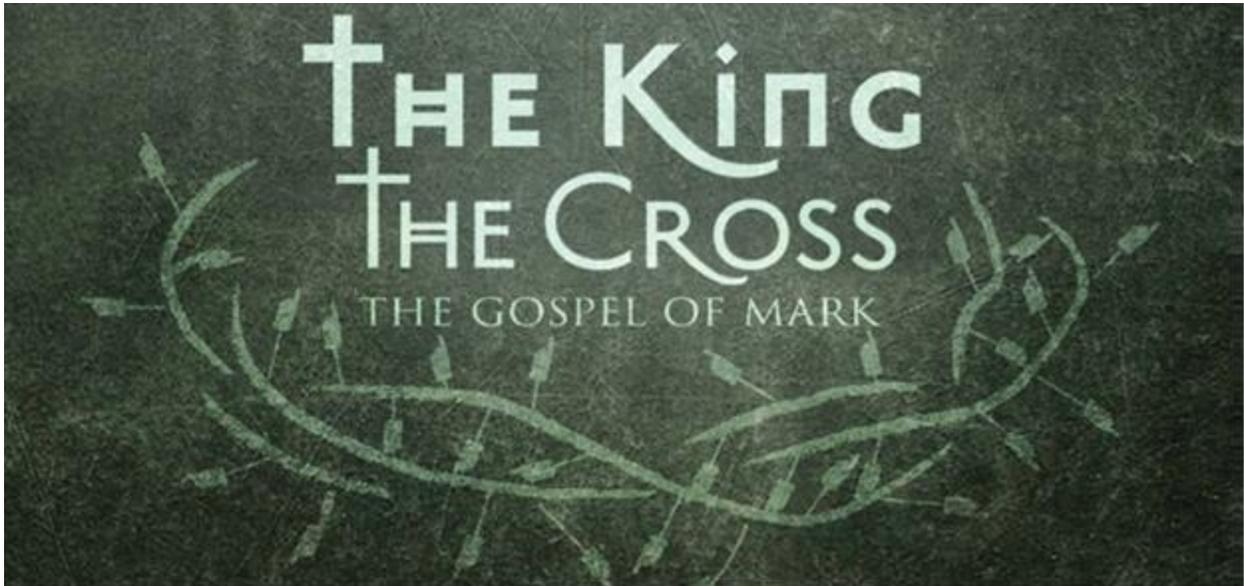


The King The Cross - Part 7
Sermon Series on the Gospel of Mark
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
July 15, 2018

TEXT: Mark 8:27-9:10



As you are looking around this morning, you might notice the conspicuous absence of high school students. There are some here with us, but I want to remind you that we have 19 people from our student ministries who are safely in Thailand, serving the Lord. Please keep them in your prayers. I know also that the number Aaron shared of those who come to know Christ daily, at times when I have shared that number, there's a palpable wave of incredulity that comes over us. We wonder if that is really possible, and sometimes it is hard for us to see that, but I want to praise God publicly, before we look at His Word, for how God is on the move. Over the weekend, Preston Watkins and Mike, who just read the Scripture for us, were part of a team sharing Christ in the prison in Columbus. I asked Mike about his day yesterday, and he said, "I had the chance to lead five people to Christ in that prison outreach over the weekend." I asked Preston this morning how it went, and Preston said, "Oh, I just got word that 770 people give their lives to Christ." Seven hundred and seventy people gave their lives to Christ in Columbus, Ohio yesterday, and we were part of that!

Are we ready to hear the words of Jesus? Let's hear the words of Jesus together. If you are just joining us, we are in the midst of a series on the Gospel of Mark, *The King - The Cross*. These both go together closely, and we been praying that, as a church family over the summer, God

would take His Word and move through us in intentional, evangelistic efforts. Some of those efforts are one-on-one meetings that people are having. I love hearing stories of some of you taking a step forward with a friend or neighbor. I've heard others say, "I'm having a small group in my neighborhood." Praise God for that! This effort over the weekend was an intentional effort to share Christ in a setting where the need is very real. Some of us are using the material called *Christianity Explored*. The title, *Christianity Explored*, has a question underneath it: "What's the Best News You've Ever Heard?" I want to ask you that right now. What's the best news you've ever heard, the best news that came into your life? Maybe some of you are thinking of a birthday that was unlike any other. Maybe some of you are thinking of a dream anniversary trip. Maybe some of you are thinking of an acceptance to the college that you dreamed of attending. Christianity has as its center the best news that the planet has ever received. *Christianity Explored* uses three questions to guide people and encourage them into an inductive reading of the gospel of Mark. *Christianity Explored* is something that God is using globally right now and is similar to the Alpha course of a few years ago. The three questions are: "Who is Jesus? Why did He come? and What does it mean for us?" Our text this morning will answer the first of these questions very quickly, but then most of our time this morning we will labor on the second question. So let's dive right in. "Who is Jesus?" *Christianity Explored* says Jesus is the King. He is the Christ, the King whom God Himself had promised to send, who would put everything right by setting up a kingdom of justice and love.

Our text this morning begins in Mark 8:27. Jesus went with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. That is the Caesarea that Philip built in the north, not the one on the coast that Herod the Great built. We read:

"And on the way He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?'"

The disciples report divergent responses from the crowds. They told Jesus in Mark 8:28:

"John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

John the Baptist was the answer of Herod Antipas himself, that though he was responsible for the execution of John, here's a man doing things and calling for repentance. Herod in his terror was thinking: "John has come back to haunt me." Others were saying Elijah or one of the prophets. Jesus' mighty works and deeds, His authoritative speaking the Word of God, reminded people of prophetic ministry that they had not heard for 400 years. "Who do you say that I am?" This is a question that we all have to answer. Peter answered Him in Mark 8:29:

"You are the Christ."

"You are the anointed King; You are the promised Messiah," is His meaning, and we celebrate this wonderful news. The first question, "Who is Jesus," is answered quite plainly here. Jesus is the Christ; He is the promised Messiah. Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels are structured in a

way that reaches an initial crescendo with this confession: Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the Christ. The King has returned. The legitimate Sovereign is back from exile. Victory is surely close at hand, and there is a note of excitement. I don't know for sure if Peter and the others felt exegetical euphoria, but if they did, it is certain they felt it right here: joy! And yet the next line comes to us as a great surprise. Look carefully at Mark 8:30:

“And He strictly charged them to tell no one about Him.”

Now this must have come as a jolt of discontinuity. The King has just been clearly identified. We have been praying for His arrival, anticipating it for hundreds of years. The sequence of kingdoms has reached its end and the kingdom of God must be at hand. Jesus has been announcing the kingdom. Of all the questions rushing through the disciples' minds, the foremost question must have been: “Whom can I tell next? The King, the real Ruler of the world, has been found! Hallelujah!” Yet, the King turns to those with Him and says, “Don't tell anyone about Me.” The verb used here is an intensive one. The ESV tries to bring that out by translating it as *“strictly charged.”* In Mark 9:9, as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus says this again. He charged them, literally, He commanded them to tell no one what they had seen on the mountain. Later, in Mark 7, as they were passing through Galilee, again we read that Jesus did not want anyone to know. So I found myself wondering: “Is this whole summer series illegitimate?” That's a serious question. Three times in the passage we see: “Don't tell anyone; tell no one; He strictly charged them.” This whole summer series has been based on an plea that you would be equipped and motivated and empowered to tell people, and here Jesus is telling you, telling me, three times, “Don't tell anyone!” Why is that? If the Word of God repeats something three times, it must be something of great importance, and I believe there is.

Why does Jesus not want the disciples to tell everyone that He is the promised King? When you come to a passage in the Bible you don't understand, the best thing to do is to keep reading. So, let's keep reading, but not with the assumption that you know the answer. One of the worst things you can do when you read the Bible is to know what the Bible means before you read it. Actually, we do this all the time. I want to invite you to put yourself in the seat of the disciples. I know some of you are thinking right now, “Oh, I know this. I know what was going on here.” You have vaccinated yourself against the Word of God. When we presume that we know it before we read it, we will never learn. You see, that is exactly the position the disciples are in in this passage. They think they know how the King wins His victory, but they don't, and so Jesus has to tell them and us, “Don't tell anyone who I.” Praise God, Jesus doesn't leave us there. In Mark 8:31, Jesus begins to teach them:

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise

again.”

Jesus teaches the disciples the necessity of His suffering. Jesus teaches us that it is absolutely essential that He be rejected by the best people of His generation, that He be killed. Note the passive voice of those verbs. And yet we turn active in the end in a glorious way: *“and on the third day, rise again.”* Mark 8:32 says that He said this plainly. The verb is imperfect here. It means that Jesus was continuing to talk about it. It means this wasn't a one-off conversation, but it means that He was discussing this plainly and had to talk about it from several different angles. Peter takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke Him. The same word that is used of Jesus to the disciples of strictly charging them, now Peter uses the same language to rebuke Jesus. Jesus, turning to the disciples, rebuked Peter in Mark 8:33, and says:

“Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

There's a sudden appearance out of nowhere of the enemy of our souls. What's going on? Satan seems to leap into this passage where Jesus has just been acknowledged as the promised King, the Savior of the world, the One who will bring the victory of God. Suddenly, the enemy appears with a summons to avoid the cross at all costs. *“Do anything, Jesus. Feed 10,000 people every Friday afternoon; cast out as many demons as You like; heal as many as You like; speak of the arrival the kingdom as often as You will; but avoid the cross at all cost!”* The enemy sees the victory of God.

Jesus tells us that there is a way of thinking, and you can see the contrast. It's sobering. Peter is told that he is thinking in a man way and not in a God way. Jesus tells Peter, and us this morning, that there is a way in which all of us are tempted to think of things in a man way. He says your mind is not on the things of God, or literally on matters the way God does, but you're thinking about them in the way people think. Now, if you think you're exempt from thinking the way that people do, have your DNA checked. You are a human being and you think like a human being, and so do I. So we need Jesus to teach us how to think the way God does.

Then Jesus does something that's a little unnerving. It's like there's a private conversation of disagreement among Jesus and the Twelve, and Jesus is pressing for greater understanding, and you would think, as a disciple, *“Let's work this out in private.”* Yet, Jesus calls in the crowd and says in Mark 8:34:

“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”

Jesus brings this teaching out into the open. The disciples don't understand what He's instructing them, and He turns it into a movement, a mobile online class. I love those, actually. Did you know you can take classes at Yale for free? I took a great course this spring on Roman

architecture while I was cutting the grass. It didn't cost me a dime, and it was great. Jesus brings the crowd in, and then He teaches them: "If anyone wants to come after Me, then you have got to do three things, just three simple things. You want to follow Jesus, here it is. Let Me boil it down for you: deny yourself; pick up the cross; follow Me." Following Jesus begins with an assault on self, and you need to feel this pain. It is a really radical assault on self. Deny yourself? I don't know where you grew up exactly, but if you grew up in North America, then you've grown up with language like: Love yourself; care for yourself; take time for yourself; enjoy yourself; satisfy yourself; comfort yourself; if you're too hot, then just adjust the temperature; if you're uncomfortable in a relationship, then get rid of it; if your child is causing you too much hassle, then leave the responsibility of educating and training them to the teachers. Deny yourself? I don't remember ever hearing that. I don't remember any of the World Series ads, the radio ads, certainly none of the Super Bowl ads ever came on with a 30-second spot saying: "Deny yourself, it's the path to victory."

I remember one of the great transitions in my own life was a change from when I moved from being associate pastor to senior pastor five years ago now. I sought the counsel of people I trusted, and one of those was Alex Aronis, our Pastor Emeritus, former senior pastor. He's the one who baptized Aaron. I asked Alex: "Can we meet together? Would you tell me what I need to know?" So each time we'd meet, he'd have one piece of advice for me, and I'll never forget the first one. His first one, he looked me right in the eye and said, "Practice self-denial. Practice that. That's the heart of discipleship." Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, and we have to really be honest.

All of us should feel on our back heels at that point. If you're not, then you're not listening well and you've already figured out the meaning of the Bible before you've read it. But, then it seems to get worse. Deny yourself, and then Jesus says the next thing I want you to do is: "Pick up the cross beam and put it on your shoulders; publicly identify yourself as a condemned criminal who is against the status quo." The only people who could be crucified in the Roman world were public enemies of the state. The image of crucifixion is someone whom the society has judged to be against the society, and Jesus says to identify yourself that way, as a condemned criminal, against the state, against the world. Then Jesus says: "Once you've got that on your shoulders, now you're ready, follow Me." Jesus says: "Now, go where I'm going—suffering rejection, crucifixion," and the disciples in the crowd must have been thinking: "This is the King. We've identified the King. This is the movement of God to change the world, and this seems like an anti-movement, a self-defeating movement, short-lived." If Jesus says: "I want all My followers to be publicly executed, this is going to be a be one-generation thing."

These are very strange marching orders, aren't they from the recently-recognized Jesus? But,

Jesus knows you and knows me, and Jesus explains His words to us with four penetrating ground clauses. Look at them. Whenever you see the word “for” in the Scripture, ask yourself what it's there for. It always supports what precedes it. There are four of them.

First, Jesus says in Mark 8:35:

“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.”

That's a paradoxical declaration, isn't it? But Jesus, knowing us, says to us quite clearly that if you spend your energy on self-protection or on self-survival, if you spend all your resources on self, you end up with nothing. But, if you lose yourself for His sake, you actually save yourself. It's an invitation to shift the center of gravity to a radical abandonment to the will of God, and that's a risk. But Jesus promises that's actually the way you find yourself. You find who you are by abandoning yourself to the will of God and forgetting about yourself.

Secondly, Jesus says in Mark 8:36:

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”

This is the second ground cause, and Jesus says: “Look, you can run around in this world; you can work 80 hours a week; you can have the most robust 401(k) with the best asset-allocation of anyone in your extended family; you can check your account balances in real time with your favorite mobile app and lose everything. You can do that and then lose everything that matters most.”

Thirdly, in the third ground clause, Jesus says in Mark 8:37 (and here again is “for”):

“For what can a man give in return for his soul?”

Jesus invites us to think that your soul is the most valuable thing that you have. What would you trade for it? Jesus knows that it's within us to seek to gain so much. Jesus says you can gain the whole world actually and lose your most valuable thing.

Look at the fourth ground cause. In Mark 8:38, Jesus 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.”

Jesus says that we are all concerned with public opinion, but that you can miss the audience that matters. I had a post-traumatic Facebook experience. It was the first time as a pastor that I faced a situation where someone was devastated because of what happened to them online. Their reputation was being damaged or maligned in some way online, and they were traumatized. I tried to counsel them, but then it moved up and they were not just traumatized, they were depressed and anxious. The thermometer was going up. As I listened, I felt this

person was not far from having suicidal thoughts. It was scary, but the problem was that they had the wrong public opinion in view. You see, we can locate our identity and worth and way of living based on public opinion of our own generation, electronic voices, but Jesus says: "Can I just signal to you, by the way, that your own generation is adulterous, that they are unfaithful, and they're full of sin?" Adulterous and sinful doesn't mean just a literal adultery, but adulterous in the Bible is the term that is used for unfaithfulness to God. So, if you base your opinion on the opinions of people who are not living for Christ and who have sin in their own life, that's the wrong place to be ashamed. Jesus ways that if you do that, then He will be ashamed of us when He comes in glory. There's the opinion that matters. Jesus will appear in glory, the glory of His Father with the angels. We don't know how many angels there are, but the Bible says there myriads and myriads.

All four of these ground clauses explain Jesus' summons: "If you want to follow Me, deny yourself, pick up the cross, and follow Me," because if you move self out of the center, you actually find life. If you spend your life trying to gain this world, you could lose what matters the most, because there's nothing more valuable than your soul. The real public opinion that matters is the opinion of Christ and the Father.

The text continues in Mark 9:1. He says:

"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

The disciples must have thought "Okay, good, here now we're getting to it: the kingdom, power. Tell us more about that!" Jesus patiently instructs us. He takes the intimate three, Peter, James, and John, off to a high mountain by themselves, and Jesus is transfigured before them. They see His glory, the glory He had before the foundation of the world. He was radiant before them, and Moses and Elijah appear talking with Him. The disciples were overwhelmed by the glory of the Lord, and then God's divine glory overshadowed them, a voice spoke from this cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him." Jesus allows them to glimpse His glory on the mountain, and yet, as they were coming down, He charges them again to tell no one what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept this to themselves, talking together. The ESV says *questioning*, but the word here means they were *discussing* it. They were talking together. What does that mean?

Why did Jesus come? That is the second question from *Christianity Explored*. The answer is that Jesus came to be rejected, to be killed, and to rise again. The disciples had to wait the long journey from Galilee to Calvary to understand what this really meant. They had to wait what must have seemed an interminable three days to know if Jesus' words could really be trusted. I want you not to rush to the empty tomb. I want you to hear Jesus' call, because when Jesus is

identified as the King, we feel great hope and excitement: The thrill of victory is at hand, but we are not permitted to tell anyone who Jesus is until we understand how He will be victorious. We will misrepresent Him. We will cloud the vision of our own discipleship if our discipleship does not include the necessity of rejection, of death to self, and the promise of new life. You can't go to the empty tomb without the cross. You can't follow Jesus without the cross beam. You can't go with a love of self to the empty tomb and say, "Yes, Lord, let me live forever with my loving self and gaining the world."

There is a radical transformation that must take place, and it is on this instruction that Jesus presses in close. "Who is Jesus?" He is the King. "Why did He come?" He came to be rejected, killed, and rise again. "What is this mean for us?" It means that the cross is the pattern for the Christian life. It means joy comes in dying to self to live for Christ. The cross is the way that the King achieves His victory, and as hard as it was for the disciples to grasp, as hard as it is for us to grasp, the cross of Jesus Christ turns the world upside down, or, better yet, sets everything right. Do you believe that? I believe that, and I believe that turning the world right side up isn't something that happens only for Jesus and that we are exempt from. It means that the cross-shape is the pattern of our own discipleship, so if you want to set things right in your life, make sure it's cross-shaped, where there is a death to self, where there is a willing rejection, where you must represent an anti-this-world, this human way of thinking kind of life, and you must have all three of those elements. There's a rejection; there's a death; and then there's a rising again, and that rising again brings us into the center of God's love.

NT Wright was here at Kenwood in 2017. There you see the famous Kenwood bricks behind



him. It was a special few days. We have had almost 50,000 views of his talks here. NT Wright talks about the cross in this way, and I close with this. He writes:

"There is a famous story that concerns a Roman Catholic archbishop who told the story of three naughty young lads who one day for a laugh went into a Catholic Church and went into the confessional

one by one and confessed to all sorts of outrageous sins that they claimed they had committed. The priest being an experienced guide saw through them quite quickly. And the first two lads ran out of the church laughing but the priest hung on to the third one and said, 'Okay, you have confessed these sins. I want you to do a penance. I want you to walk up to the far end of the church and I want you to look at the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross, and I want you to look at his face and say, "You did all that for me and I don't care that much." [As he snapped his fingers.] And I want you to do that three times.'

“And so the boy went up to the front, looked at the picture of Jesus and said, ‘You did all that for me and I don’t care that much.’ And then he said it again, but then he couldn’t say it the third time because he broke down in tears. And the archbishop telling the story said, ‘The reason I know that story is that I was that young man.’ There is something about the cross.”

You see, brothers and sisters, if we want to follow Jesus, we deny ourselves, pick up the cross, and follow Him, because there is life.

Lord, we extol You this morning. We pray that You would be magnified among us and that Your Word would be made known in all the earth. Forgive us, Lord, for we have sinned against You or where we have misrepresented Your call to follow by omitting the cross. Be glorified this morning, Lord Jesus, we pray.

Amen.