

# The Cost of Discipleship

By Steven Gaines

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**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

This morning I want to speak out of the gospel of Mark, from Mark 8, the same book and chapter that Jess had read out of earlier so if you want to you can turn with me there. I'm going to be looking at verses 34 to 38, a very familiar passage of Scripture, one where Jesus is explaining to his disciples, his close disciples and also others with them, what is required for someone to come and follow after him, that is to become his disciple. So this morning that's what we're going to look at together. So if you would join me as I read starting in verse 34. It says there,

34 And he called to him the crowd 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. 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. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? 37 For what can a man give in return for his life? 38 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."

Let's pray.

*Father, I come before you today and I thank you for your word of truth. I thank you, Father, that today you have not called me to stand up and produce words of my own to engage the congregation, please the audience, but rather, Father, that you have provided your word that is true. I ask that you would come by your Holy Spirit enabling me to bring it forth accurately and truthfully and, Father, as well that you would open the minds and the hearts of those who have come today to hear from you. And I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*

I want to start off today as we consider this passage, I want you to consider an account that C. S. Lewis brings forth about his early life. He says this, "When I was a child, I often had toothaches and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep, but I did not go to my mother, at least not until the pain became very bad, and the reason I did not go was this: I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin but I knew she would also do

something else, I knew she would take me to the dentist next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right and I knew those dentists, I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie. If you gave them an inch, they took a mile."

Now, it's kind of humorous for us and, of course, for most of us I don't know anyone who really likes going to the dentist, probably not the doctor either, but it's humorous to us because we find this experience in real life, that sometimes we have a particular issue that we want to deal with but we don't want to really go through what it takes to get the issue dealt with. If you went to your doctor and you told him you were having some pain somewhere around in here and they did some tests and then they said, "Sir, I have really good news for you. We know what your condition is and we know what the solution is and it's going to be surgery and that's going to be followed by rehab and then it's going to be physical therapy and dietary restrictions," and the person said, "Do you know what? I want to be free from this pain but that really, I'm not going there. I'm just not going to go through what needs to be done."

This morning we would consider the cost of discipleship through our study of this well-known account in the life of Jesus and his disciples. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this teaching, each gospel having minor additions or abbreviations according to the Spirit's particular purpose there. Now, as we consider a familiar passage today, sometimes for us passages like this if you've been around for years or decades in the church, when you've heard a message preached on or a passage preached on many times, it's easy to do one of two things: one thing is to kind of tune out a little bit, you're not really expecting to hear anything new to have your understanding deepened; another possibility as well is to merely think about what is being said, how it's being said, kind of a comparison. "Well, I heard So-and-so preach on this passage and he did it like this, and somebody else covered it like this." Well, I understand that tendency myself. I'm there with you. But today what I want you to do is I want you to put those off and I want you to try to listen with open ears in a fresh way to consider what God may have to speak to you through this passage today because if you are following Christ today, that doesn't mean that you did a one-time event and now you're on your own but it's a call to continued discipleship, continued sanctification and following him.

Perhaps today one of you may say in your heart, "I'm not really interested in becoming a disciple of Christ this morning." Well, I believe there is a word here for you today. Another might say, "Well, I'm not really sure if I want to be a disciple of Christ. What will that mean for me?" I think God will speak to you as well. Another case, for instance, might be someone who says, "I actually profess to be a disciple of Christ but I really don't want to give up complete control of my life and there are just a few sins that I want to hang onto that I don't want to let go of that are really precious and dear to me." I think there is a word for you here. And finally, for someone who says, "I know that I am following Christ. Help me evaluate my life and purposes in light of his calling." There is a word for you as well as we enter the passage today.

Well, the structure of the sermon is very simple. There are two questions that we are going to look at. The first one is: what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? And there are going to be three components to that that Jesus gives. The second part of the sermon is going to be: why should I be a disciple of Christ? And we're going to see four reasons that are presented there. So it's a very simple structure, the passage is very simple as it is laid out for us. It is not the organization or the arrangement of the material that is difficult for us but it is rather the content and the application of it to our lives that is the challenge for us today.

So let's consider the first question: what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? As I read earlier, we read in this passage that, "Calling the crowd to him 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.'" I had Jess read the earlier part in Mark 8 to give us a context of what was going on. That's the famous passage where Peter is recognizing that Jesus is the Christ, and in Matthew we find out that he's the Christ, the Son of the living God, and so we have Peter making a great statement about Christ as the Messiah followed by Jesus delivering hard teaching about what's about to happen in his life. In those verses we find out that what's going to happen is that he's got to suffer many things and he's going to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. So we have here this first very clear prediction of his death that is to come. So we have Peter putting forth Christ as the Messiah, Jesus saying hard things followed by Peter turning around and now trying to tell Jesus that this is a bad plan, that this is not the way it should be, and Peter getting rebuked, and we find out that behind Peter's countering the plans of Christ is Satan himself working through Peter. So this is the immediate context of this passage so when we think about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, he had just gone through confronting one of his own followers who really had a misunderstanding, thinking that it was allowable to be a disciple of Christ and sort of go and direct his path as opposed to submitting to his will and the path that he had to walk on.

Well, let's consider the first of the three aspects. The first thing that he says is that, "If you're going to come after me, that you have to deny yourself." That you have to deny yourself. The meaning of this word actually is pretty strong because it takes two words in Greek and puts them together. One of them already means "to deny or reject," but by adding the second to it, it means "strongly reject," that is, to heighten or intensify the idea of what this denial would mean. In the context itself, it seems to indicate or counter the idea that we can go to Christ and we can direct his way. Jesus has just given clear speech about his need to go to Jerusalem, suffer and die, and so now to be a disciple of Christ means, "I have to go on Christ's plan and not my own," because Christ's plan means that your leader is going to go forward and going to give himself up to his opposition and to pursue something that does not seem amenable or pleasing. Of course, as Christ came to his people, they were looking for a Messiah who would be a conqueror, who would be a military deliverer, and yet he came as one who was going to be humble, who was going to be the Lamb of God, without sin, without blemish, the one who would come to be the sacrificial lamb.

So when we consider this in its context and in its basic meaning, what does this mean? What does self-denial mean? What does it mean that we have to deny ourselves to be a disciple of Christ? I don't know what you think about first when you think about self-denial but in our culture today, self-denial is not something that is absent, okay? For instance, I'll mention just one category where self-denial is pretty popular, that is in diet and weight loss, okay? So if we were to go out and we were to go to a bookstore today together and we were to look at all the different books that are out there, we would find numerous approaches to diet. Of course, we have had those famous diets in the past where you don't eat any carbs and you eat all meat and everything else you can do that and then, of course, we have dietary programs where you count the points for certain things. So you have all types of diet approaches out there but they all involve some aspect of denying yourself, that means if you go on that diet, you can't have everything of all types of food that you want in the quantities that you want to have them. You have to give something up somewhere.

So someone might think when we first think of self-denial that when Christ is calling us to deny ourselves in becoming his disciples, the first and foremost, that it's really going to just involve a list of rules and restrictions. For instance, if I follow a certain plan and I have a certain number of points in my diet...I remember one time I was having breakfast with a man early one morning and I think he had two sausage biscuits and he was going on this plan and he said, "You know, I've used up all my points for the day right here." But we can think that this self-denial is fundamentally going to involve sort of a list of rules and regulations; that that's primarily what's going to be at the heart of being Christ's disciple. But I would argue with you that, first, it's going to be something that is much more difficult: it is first going to be giving up the right to unaided direction in our lives. Think about that for a minute. In other words, it's basically saying, "We are giving up the right to direct ourselves the way we want to be directed, but rather we're going to have to give that up and we're going to have to allow Christ to come in and to direct us." Now, that's a big deal. You know, you could probably give up eating sweets or cholesterol or carbs or something else but think about this, this is a day-in, day-out, major decision, minor decision issue in your life of whether you are going to allow Christ to have control or yourself.

You remember the famous quote from the poem by William Henley, at the end of it he says,

"It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul."

What a voice not of self-denial but one that says, "I will not have anyone to rule over me. That no matter what happens to me in the end," someone who wouldn't even fear the eternal punishment to come, but most importantly that he is the captain of his soul. But the call to self-denial in following Christ is exactly the opposite. It is a call of self-denial

that says, "I cannot follow my desires and the desires of Christ. I will follow him wherever he leads in whatever way that that means." It means that we will have to deny our flesh, that is, the sin nature that is within us that is dragging us and enticing us and leading us astray into all kind of places and that we will have to fight against it. We can consider Ephesians 6 and other similar passages that remind us that the call of the Christian life is a call to warfare; that when we get up in the morning, that even though it may be a beautiful day, the birds are chirping, the sun is shining, the weather is warm and temperate and it looks like it's going to be a wonderful day, that our call to self-denial in following Christ means that we are going to have to engage in warfare; that no matter how beautiful the externals, that we cannot follow the natural course of our desires.

J. C. Ryle wrote this, he said, "Our sins are often as dear to us as our children. We love them, hug them, cleave to them, and delight in them." Now, for some people that part of the quote may seem strange because sometimes our sins really discourage us because we're locked in bondage to something and we can't get out of it but really deep down if we go beneath the surface, we find this is true, that sometimes even though we say we hate a sin, but at the same time there is an aspect that we love them. He writes further, "To depart from them is as hard as cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye but it must be done. The parting must come. He and sin must quarrel if he and God are to be friends. Christ is willing to receive any sinners but he will not receive them if they stick to their sins." This morning I ask you: do you love your sin? Do you love it and hug it and cleave to it and delight in it? Do you not love Jesus Christ? Do you not believe that by coming to him, turning from your sin, repenting of them and following him that you will find in Christ a Savior who is wonderful? One whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light?

Not only does he say that we are to deny ourselves but he further says that we need to "take up our cross." You know, this passage is a hard passage and it doesn't get any easier as we go forward, does it? It was hard enough to consider the first part, well, now he says we have to take up our cross. Now, let's go back to the context for just a minute to clear up a few things on this. When Jesus was saying this to his disciples, he had not yet himself gone to the cross. He had just predicted it, that he was going and on his way there, but for the people who he was speaking to, they would have understood this concept of taking up your cross from the actual experience of seeing other criminals that had been convicted and had been sentenced to crucifixion do this act. So the picture here was that the criminal would actually have to go and take up that element of the cross and carry it with them to the place of their execution.

Many people in the church over the centuries have gotten a little bit confused on this idea. When Jesus says "take up our cross," there is a big difference because when he took up his cross and he went to Calvary and he died, he died as a sacrifice for sin and he died as a propitiation for sin, absorbing and exhausting the wrath of God for all who would believe, but when he's asking us to take up our cross, he's not asking us to do anything that has atoning value for our sin. We don't need to misunderstand that there is somehow some action that we can do of either self-denial or some hardship that we can go through, but somehow and in some way it's making us right with God or in right standing with

him. So I think it's good for us to remember that and clear that up, that we do follow after him by taking up our cross just as he did, but it is very different in many aspects that are here. During the time period of Christ, as the condemned man was forced to carry his own cross, he did it not willingly but under compulsion. William Hendrickson writes that what the convict does under duress, the disciple of Christ does willingly. He voluntarily and decisively accepts the pain, the shame and persecution that is going to be his particular lot, not someone else's, because of his loyalty to Christ and his cause.

Now, we see in the world even today that there are many who take up their cross and follow Christ and they have to suffer major persecution. Many of them, as they take up the cross of Christ simply by professing their faith in him, their families now abandon them because they have left the religion of their upbringing and they can no longer be tolerated. For other people, as we have seen so graphically and brutally who call upon Christ in recent days, may be the subject of terror and of execution and of other things that come. Many others throughout church history have had lesser losses, the loss of economic ability to go forward in a certain culture in a certain place, that there has been opposition to them. But let me bring this down a little closer to us today at what it means to take up our cross. To take up the cross of Christ in following after him means that we are going to identify with him no matter what. So that means that 50 years ago in America, taking up your cross and saying that you were a Christian would still get you opposition in certain places from certain people at certain times, but taking it up today and just standing for Christ in a clear, bold and definite way, is something that may have uncertain results or responses depending on your situation. It means that no matter what is going to come, that you are going to bear your relationship and your connection with him without reservation and without concern for what will happen.

I believe too in taking up our cross, it also means that as we take up the call to the Christian life and all that comes with it, and all the hardship that may come from it, that we do it in a willing manner. You know, it's easy sometimes in our flesh, I would say, when we think about a cross, someone might say, "Well, you know, that's just my cross to bear." You know, there is a hard or difficult person in their life, hard or difficult circumstance. I've heard it just kind of flippantly used, you know, as it is put out there, but when we say it like that or even think about taking up our cross in that way, we are definitely not taking it up willingly, are we? We're doing it in such a way that it's this heavy thing that has been thrust down upon us and we just are going to deal with it and grit our teeth as we bear through it. But I think here this is something quite different, it is something that is willing, something that we do with a heart that says, "Lord, it may be hard and difficult and I may stumble some on the way but, Lord, I want to do this. I want to take up the cross that you have given me."

The third aspect here of following Christ after denying ourselves and taking up our cross, he says "to follow me." Now, for many of you that have been here for the last six years and have followed the Gospel of John, we have looked at that in great detail of what it means to follow Christ, to look at him, to see what he has done, what he taught, how he reacted in those situations. Consider with me that we are called to follow Christ in his example, that is, 1: his example of holiness. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see

Jesus fulfilling the positive commands that God had given to his people, the one who was not selfish, who was not living for his own pleasures or desires, the one who was loving and giving out and expressing compassion and who was praying and who was worshiping and who was doing everything according to his Father's command. We also see his example of holiness in the negative sense, that he was one who never once in his life disobeyed one of God's commands, never once disobeyed external commands and never once in his heart coveted or committed lust or hated in his heart another person. We find too as we are called to follow Christ, his example of love for the despised; that Jesus in showing the love of God for sinful people went out in the society to those who were the downcast, to the tax collectors and the sinners and the prostitutes of his day, and conveyed the love of Jesus Christ to them. We are to follow his example. I think we also see his example of righteous indignation, something we forget sometimes, that to be a follower of Christ not only means that you positively affirm the things of God and the things that are true, but it also means that you take a negative stand against unrighteousness.

It is tempting, of course, if we want to be accepted by the world and its people, to have sort of the same sense that people have today of, "You know, you can have your own truth and I can have mine, and you can have your own standard of righteousness and living and I can have mine. You can do what you want to do and I can do what I want to do, and we can never cast judgment over anyone else in their actions or their behavior." But to follow Christ is to be like him, the one who came into the temple and he turned over the tables of the money changers and he gave the woes to the Pharisees and he confronted them in their unrighteousness and their hypocrisy and he was bold in doing so, but never at any time in his boldness was he committing a sin against God, rather he was being holy and pleasing to him.

Consider another reference from J. C. Ryle, "Christianity will cost a man his love of ease. He must take pains and trouble if he means to run a successful race toward heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard like a soldier on enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behavior every hour of the day in every company and in every place in public as well in private, among strangers as well as at home."

I ask you today: are you a disciple of Christ? When you consider what Jesus says when he answers the question, "What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ?" Does this describe you? Now, don't misunderstand me today. I'm not trying to put some sort of works righteousness before you where you have to do certain things and if you do enough of them that you will now become pleasing to God and in favor in his sight, but what I'm asking you is that you evaluate your life: are you denying yourself in your pursuit of Jesus Christ or is it self plus Christ in your pursuits? I ask you when you think of the hardships that come with the Christian life and even the pursuit of holiness, is that something that you take up willingly or is that something to you that is just a heavy burden? Is it something that just weighs upon you? And I ask you as well: are you following Christ both in his example and in his teaching? We find in his teaching in the book of John that if we love Christ, we are going to obey his commands; that there is no way that we can say we love him if we are not willing to obey his commands, and that

that is the very way that we demonstrate our love back to him, by hearing him and listening and responding in obedience.

Well, let's move on to the second point of the sermon: why should I be a disciple of Christ? We find here in this section, as I mentioned before, the four reasons that are listed. The first one of those reasons is this: 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." So one way to consider this first reason is this, if you want to paraphrase it and think of it a different way, is that clinging to your natural self will result in both temporal and eternal loss while surrendering your natural self will result in temporal and eternal joy and fulfillment. We have here this idea of a paradox that is presented to us in the Christian life. It's this idea that if we try to save something, that we're going to lose it but then if we lose something, that in the end we're actually going to save it. Now, that is a little bit of a paradox and, of course, sometimes when we hear the statements of Jesus and we first hear them, we say, "That's kind of hard to understand," and it seems a little philosophical perhaps, like, does this really have any real and definite meaning to it or is this sort of a pious kind of spiritual religious sounding phrase to it? Well, let's unpack it for a little bit here. One point to make in these four reasons is that he mentions here something that is translated in this first part as "life" and also can be translated as "soul," and so it depends on the context which this particular word is translated, but apparently what he's really trying to hit home here when he talks about the soul or the life is it is man himself, his eternal reality, his soul, his person, himself. It's a comprehensive term that's trying to be emphasized here.

So when he says this, he says that whoever would save his life would lose it, I believe especially in terms of the first part of his call to discipleship, that he might mean something like this: he says to the person that is looking to his natural life and natural self and says, "I need to hold on and I need to protect me, myself, my interests, my goals, my desires, my longings, my wants, everything there, I need to hold onto that. I need to protect it. I need to get as much out of my life and wishes and wants and desires as I possibly can and I need to keep it and not let anybody tamper with that," Jesus is saying here that you can attempt that approach in life and there are millions of people all over the world, in our country, that are doing that even this very day, but what he says is the ultimate result of that is that you're going to lose it in the end. And he says the counter truth with this is that if you actually give all of that up and you say, "Lord, here I am. I am going to give over to you my desires and my wants and wishes and my hopes and my dreams and my pride and my glory and my honor, I'm going to give it all over to you and I'm going to humble myself in your sight and I am going to submit myself to you and I'm going to believe that when you said that whoever humbles himself will be exalted, I'm going to believe that and I'm going to live like that. I'm going to each day lay it down before you." I think Jesus is saying here that if you do that and you lose it, that the truth is you're actually going to save your life and you're going to find something that is far greater and that is far richer and more pleasing and more satisfying in this life. I think of that beautiful ending of Psalm 16 where we read, "In your presence there is fullness of joy, eternal pleasures at your right hand." In another Psalm at the end where it says, "And we will be satisfied with your likeness." That picture not of satisfaction in earthly things



or material wealth or position or honor, but rather to be satisfied with the presence of God in a relationship with him. Is that you? So if you ask today, "Why should I be a disciple of Christ?" I would give you Jesus' answer which is, "Your own attempts to save everything and to make everything in your life right for yourself and the best it can be, is ultimately going to fail, but to give it away and to follow Christ will give you a great reward and great joy."

Well, let's consider a second reason. The second reason he gives is this, it's another question, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" Now, of course, these reasons Jesus is giving have overlapped with each other so I don't mean to try to completely separate them into distinct categories that have no connection with one another, but I think in this one, he's now giving the question out to the people, "Well, is there anything in this world that is really worth forfeiting your eternal destiny?" Now think about that for a minute. What can this world provide? Well, it can provide a number of things. One of those, of course, is material wealth and possessions. You could get land. You could get money. You could get to a point where you could buy companies and corporations. You could be over a lot of people and give them direction and have power. You could meet influential people in this life. Maybe you could get into politics. Perhaps there are other things that this world has to offer as well that you think are fulfilling, that could give you desires to fulfill your lust or desires to fulfill whether that's sexual lust or whether it's the best foods in the world or drink or to satisfy you or give you a high on some kind of drug that can be there, the world can offer all of this to you. Now, of course you've got to pay for it. You might pay for it with money. You might pay for it with your relationships. You might pay for it by ruining your marriage or your family life or any number of other things that go along with it. But there's something out there that it can give. But Jesus is saying at the end of all this, really, "What can the world give compared to your eternal destiny? Is what the world has to offer really worth giving up your own soul?" And the implication here in this particular reason is this: you can't have both. You cannot have all of that and have hope for eternal life and for your soul.

Consider the well-known parable of the rich fool that Jesus told from Luke 12. He warned the people and said to them, "Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." And he told them the parable saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"" Doesn't that in some ways typify a little bit of 21st-century Western American materialism in our thinking, in our approach to life? You know, "I'm going to get all that I can. I'm going to have a comfortable life. I'm going to have all the entertainment that I can fit in and squeeze into that life, and then I'm going to have it all stored up there and then I am going to find satisfaction in that very thing." But at the end of the parable, it says this, "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." So today in this second

reason, I would argue that there is nothing that this world can offer that is comparable to giving up your soul.

The third reason is similar and follows along where it says, "For what can a man give in return for his soul?" Because of in that second reason you have forfeited it and given it up, what else are you going to be able to do or to purchase or acquire to get it back? And the answer is: nothing. There is absolutely nothing that is there.

Reason number four takes a little bit of a different direction and reminds us that there is a judgment to come. Reason number four says, "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." Now, initially when Jesus said this fourth reason, initially he was speaking to the people of Israel, the ones who were the professing people of God, the nation that had his covenants. They had the word of God through the Old Testament Scripture and now they had the Messiah before them and yet the majority of them rejected that Messiah. They would not accept Jesus to be the Son of God.

His words, I believe, have application as well for us today and remind us that one of the reasons that we need to become a disciple of Christ is that there is a time when there is going to be a judgment on this earth and a judgment for us, a judgment seat that we will all face one day, and the words here strike very striking, in a way it seems to make practical sense, he says this, "Well, if you're ashamed of me and my words now, then I'm going to be ashamed of you in the future." That's not too hard for us to understand, is it? You know, it's sort of like maybe when you were younger and you were a kid and you were trying to figure out who was my friend and who is going to act like they know me and you'd go in this situation and a person would act like they are your friend and they are close to you, and then you'd go be around a different group of people and they were all aloof and didn't acknowledge you, and it was sort of this thing of going, "Well, do you know what? That just doesn't work, does it? Right? If you're really my friend, you're my friend here and here and here and everywhere else."

So Jesus is saying if you want to be his disciples, you can't decide that you're going to go out in the world and just act like you really don't know him and you don't want to be part of his plan and you don't want to be part of all those things that go along with being a Christian. "You mean you really believe those things? Do you really believe there is a Holy Spirit? Do you really believe that there was Jesus who died and he rose again? Don't you know all the evidence that there is out there that tells us that he was just a man and that this is just a pious fraud?" Well, if you're going to be a disciple of Christ, you have to go and you have to say, "I'm going to stand with Jesus and I am not going to be ashamed of him and I am not going to turn away from him." In the hope there is that there is going to be a day in the future that you can trust his promises, that the God who said to us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," the one who said, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus," that he's going to do that. That he is a faithful God that even when we are unfaithful, that he will not deny himself and do what he has said to do.

So today as we look at these four reasons, I ask you: are you a disciple of Christ? And if you are not today, why not? When you have heard these reasons that are set before you, what is keeping you from coming to Christ?

Well, in conclusion today as we look at this message, I would like to take a little bit of time and try to apply these Scriptures a little more pointedly. I have come up with four different, I call them cases or places that you might be today, and my hope today is to try to apply this text particularly to where you might be.

Case 1 is this: the person who says either with their lips or in their heart, "I'm not really interested in becoming a disciple of Christ this morning. I'm just really not that interested." It could be something where it's just really kind of a lack of consideration or a lack of interest or maybe you've got something better going on today that you're looking forward to and this is just sort of a blip in your plan where you have to move through this. But I want to ask you this: Jesus says that if you are trying to save your life, which if you are not interested in being his disciple by default you are, he says that ultimately your plans will fail; that the way of the transgressor is hard; that sometimes it seems like the way of following Christ must be this really hard and terrible thing. You know, if you grew up in the church or are growing up in the church, you kind of look around you and see what's going on, you look at your parents, you look at the other adults around and you think, if you think of it like this, this doesn't sound very appealing, "You mean if I become a Christian, that means on Sunday mornings I'm going to have to start going to church and I'm going to have to do that every week? Am I actually going to have to start giving my money to the Lord's purposes and plans? Am I going to have to read the Bible and pray? Am I actually going to have to start thinking about the things I watch with my eyes on television or the Internet or the images that are there? Am I actually going to have to start thinking about what it means to be holy? Am I going to have to put forth effort?" It seems like as you make the list go on and on, that it's like endless drudgery and misery if you view it from the wrong perspective. "You mean it's just going to lead me into a life of restriction and it's going to take away the things of the world that could be so satisfying and desirous to me?"

Well, that's one way to look at it but I don't think it's the right way. I think the right way to look at it is this: to look at it as the fact that a God who is a loving God, as we read in Scripture, did this, that he sent his one and only Son into the world, not coming into the world so that the world might be condemned, but rather that the world might be saved, and that he came into the world so that sinful people who rebelled against him and who broke his commandments and did not love him and do not deserve it, might be able to come into a right relationship with him. He came not for his own need but he came for our need, to give us hope and the ability to be in a relationship from him. And I would warn you today if you are not interested in becoming a disciple of Christ, that he said it already, that if you're ashamed of him now, that he will be ashamed of you in the future; that there is a day coming and it is spoken of in many different ways when the false wheat, the tares, are going to be separated from the true wheat and where the sheep are going to be separated from the goats. And there is going to come a time where there is

going to be a separation and some are going to go off into eternal life but others to go off into eternal punishment. Today if you are rejecting Christ and you will not follow after him, I would call you to repent of your sins, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to believe that God demonstrates his own love for us in this, "That while we were still sinners, that Christ died for us," to turn from your sin, to turn to Christ and to believe in him and follow him.

Well, the second case would be someone who says this, "I'm not sure whether or not I want to be a disciple of Christ. Can you explain what it will mean for me?" Well, a lot of this, of course, we've already done today so I don't want to be too repetitive but what will it mean? It will mean 1: a submission to a loving Master. Turning away from self and self desires and actually giving yourself to someone else to lead you, and that means that when you grow up and you are 20, 30, 40, 50, 70, 80, 90, 100, that you are still in submission to a loving Master, that you never proceed on to the part where you take control of your life but you give your life to him.

It also means that you will have to, in that, realize that you're not going to be able to enjoy everything the world has to offer. Now, that may seem in some ways today to be almost redundant. Perhaps in previous generations in the church that would have been the more redundant message. But today it means that just because you have mobile devices and media and access and television and are able to have all the information and all the media and all the entertainment that you want, it doesn't mean that if you follow Christ, that all of that is for you; that it will be good for you and help you in your spiritual life, and it will mean saying yes to Jesus and his commands. It will mean that as you learn more about him, more about what he is calling you to do and be in the Christian life, that when you hear it, you say yes, and then you say yes again, and then you say yes a third time, and then later in life, in your Christian life when you realize you haven't been walking in obedience and it is pointed out to you, you go, "Lord, I'm sorry. I've been saying no and I need to say yes now." This is what he is calling you to do.

But if you're in this position today, I would warn you as well to realize you are not on neutral territory because in John 3, we learn the truth that whoever does not believe already stands condemned because he has not believed in the name of the Son of God. So I would call you out of that position, that position of waffling or wavering, and to come to Christ and to believe on him for eternal life.

The third case I'd like to consider is someone who would say this in their heart, "I profess to be a disciple of Christ but I don't think I'm going to give up complete control of my life and I really want to hold on to a few of my sins." Now, I don't really think that someone would say this that clearly and directly because it would be a self-condemning statement, but that is something I believe that could be said in the heart. "I want to be a disciple of Christ but I really want it on my own terms."

Now, it's interesting to me from my own experience how many wonderful things you can enjoy connected with the Christian life in the church and not actually be in Christ and his disciple. I remember as a teenager enjoying many things in church, there were very nice

people there and they were very loving; it was a good environment, they had activities that were enjoyable; the fellowship was good, it was great to be around people and that was an excellent thing; there were some interesting things that I heard when people spoke, that was kind of interesting to ponder and consider, but this was all going on while I knew in my heart I wasn't a Christian, that is, I wasn't ready, I wasn't willing to turn my life to Christ but I wanted to do it my way. I wanted to keep my intellect and my approach and yet I wanted to enjoy these other things that I was getting out of it.

Well, I would tell you today that if you are saying that, "I profess to be a disciple of Christ but I'm not going to give up complete control of my life, I want to hold onto my sins," that Christ offers you no hope for your present position. And I say that not to be harsh but just read the passage yourself if you don't agree with my statement because he said if you're going to come and be his disciple, you've got to deny yourself and that you've got to take your cross and follow him. Today that's what I would urge you to do. I would urge you to turn from a misunderstanding that you would clarify your position, that you would see your need to come to him not on your own terms but on his. Don't think like Peter who as soon as Jesus started talking about going to Jerusalem and suffering and dying and all of this, you say, "Okay, Lord, that's a bad plan. Let me help you out. I'm going to redirect you." Instead of doing that, to say, "Lord, I will give myself to you. Take over control."

And in the last case, the person who says, "I know that I am following Christ. Help me evaluate my life and purposes in light of his calling." To you I would say to remember that Christ's call is a call first to conversion, but then a call to continued sanctification throughout your life; that there is no sense of an initiation experience that's mentioned in this passage. Now, perhaps some of you were in the military and you went through boot camp or something like that, if you could just survive a period of weeks and make it through, you were in. Perhaps others of you may have been in a fraternity in college or a sorority and you had some kind of initial period and they did hazing or some other certain thing and you had to do a bunch of crazy things but then you were in, and once you were in, you were in and that was it. You had gotten through that initiation rite. Well, the call to discipleship here is not an initiation rite. Yes, it involves conversion, coming to Christ, experiencing by God's grace his justification when you were made right, in right standing with him, your sins transferred to Christ, the righteousness of Christ placed on your account, but yet it includes an entire life of following him in sanctification. It means that maybe you had to deny yourself when you first came to Christ when you were 20 but now that you're 40 or 50, you're finding out that there are new things that came up since that period of time and maybe you were single when it happened and then you got married and then you had children, and maybe everything at work went well and then it didn't, and then the economy was hard, and now all of a sudden you have this going on and now you have medical issues and you have pain and you have difficulty, and yet Christ is calling you to be his disciple, to deny yourself and take up your cross in this situation regardless of where he has put you.

Well, to close out finally today, I would say this. This is a hard passage for us but yet it is a passage that is given to us by a loving Savior. Not by a hard, cruel taskmaster. Not by

an uninterested or uncaring boss who just lays down work and assignments without any concern for how we will do them. A God who has provided to us who are in Christ the Holy Spirit indwelling us, empowering us to live and to please him; a God of grace who knows that we can't do it on our own, who it is by grace that we have been saved through faith and this is not of ourselves; who gives us the gift of God, something that is not of our own works, our own merit. Today I ask you: are you following Jesus Christ? And if not, why not? And if you are following Christ, to come to him, to love and trust him and follow him every day to your dying hour.

Let's close in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for your word and the way that it searches us. We thank you, Father, for calling us to Christ and to sending people into our lives to preach the Gospel to us, to not leave us in our sinful condition. And we thank you, Father, now for the wondrous joy that we have in him, for the wondrous hope we have of heaven. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*