

**Mark 8:31-38(ESV)** <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." <sup>34</sup>And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? <sup>37</sup>For what can a man give in return for his life? <sup>38</sup>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."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

At the center of this church is the cross. At the center of the book of Mark is the central teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. There is no more important teaching ever than the teaching of the cross of Jesus Christ. Without the cross there is no Christianity, no gift of salvation, no hope of heaven. Without the cross the future is only despair and hell. The cross is where Christ's work was completed, and the resurrection and ascension prove it. The cross symbolizes the work of Christ that saves us for eternity. **1. The cross is a symbol of suffering and death.** Jesus suffered on the cross an agonizing death. Friends, we too will suffer in this life. Christians are not immune to suffering. Jesus did public ministry for three years. During that time he was ostracized, ridiculed, mocked, rejected, even by members of his own family. To take up one's cross is to know with certainty that you too will be mistreated, misjudged, made fun of, rejected, or even bullied because you follow Christ. To take up your cross is to do the right thing and stay faithful to Jesus even when being mistreated by those around you, including members of your own family. To take up your cross is to unabashedly and unashamedly speak the words of the Gospel to souls desperately hungry to hear it. Paul says, "I believe therefore I speak." **2. Every soul is hungry for the Good News whether they admit it or not.**

Not that long ago I drove into the parking lot at Butera. I saw a group of high school students sitting in a circle having an intense conversation. Figuratively I picked up the cross and took the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ with me. I asked them, "Would you people mind if I prayed for you, and it is okay to say no?" After asking the question I quickly looked at each student. I waited for an answer and the answer was no. So, I spoke these words. "God bless you all and please know that the Lord Jesus loves each and every one of you," and I walked away. Jesus says, <sup>38</sup>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." Friends when we actually open our mouths and speak of God, God's love, the Gospel, we have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. Paul writes, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation. When I saw those students, I knew in my heart that their souls are hungry for Jesus. **3. To take up one's cross not only impacts one's behavior but also we are given a new language, the language of the Good News of Jesus bursting forth to get out of us.** Woe to us if we do not speak.

**4. The cross is also a symbol of victory.** Jesus rose from the dead gaining complete victory over sin, death, Satan and hell for all believers. The cross symbolizes for us the victories that we experience during this life due to the resurrection power of Christ working in our lives. The cross teaches us that we are fully forgiven for all of our sin because the Holy Spirit has applied to us the finished work of Jesus on the cross. You have been absolved of all your sins. "If we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all righteousness."

Back in the mid 80's my mother was driving my grandmother to a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Grandma said, "You know Norma, they had to get married." 50 years later that

particular situation was still being held against the couple. From God's perspective that was long forgotten, never to be held against them again for they were firm believers in Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells us that in this world we will have tribulation (John 16:33). The Bible tells us that as we cling to Christ, as we live by faith in Christ we will be victorious over this world. This is the resurrection side of the cross. Yes, we get knocked down, the suffering side of the cross. The resurrection power raises us anew over and over as we overcome the ill treatment and evil of our day. **5. The cross is the symbol of death and resurrection. 1 John 5:4(NIV)** <sup>4</sup>for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

In verse 31 of Mark 8 Jesus is pouring out his heart to the disciples. He is holding nothing back. He is telling them exactly what was going to happen to him. Jesus knew his future. He was a man on a mission. Time was short and he had to prepare the disciples that He would die a tortuous death. Jesus had to prepare them for his own mistreatment. The religious leaders would completely reject Jesus and put him to death. Jesus did not want the disciples to be caught off guard and shocked at the way their leader, Jesus, would be treated.

Jesus is telling them about the cross that he will bear, meaning the cross that he will be nailed too. Jesus literally did take up his cross when he walked to Golgotha down the Via del a Dolorosa. He could only carry it a short way, the cross beam, until Simon of Cyrene came along and carried it the rest of the way to where Jesus was crucified. The disciples needed to be prepared to see their master teacher suffer and die.

Friends, I want you to hear what I am about to say. Jesus never sinned and yet during the days of his ministry he suffered more than any person who walked the face of this earth. On the cross the suffering he endured, there are not words to describe. He bore the sin, guilt, and shame of the world. He descended into hell. He was forsaken by the Father and still he hung there trusting in the Father to raise Him from the dead. He never lost His trust in the Father. My

point is this, **6. not all of human suffering is the result of personal sin but all suffering occurs because we live in a fallen world flooded with the power of sin.** Before Adam and Eve rebelled against God, suffering did not exist. Their sin against God opened the door to human suffering that will not end until Jesus comes again and there will be no more suffering. Sin is done away with forever. Some persons in this church are in a season of suffering and it is not the result of your own sin at all. You did nothing at all to deserve the suffering you are experiencing. To take up your cross is to do what Jesus did. It is to keep trusting in God during your season of suffering knowing that the resurrection power of Christ will help you overcome everything that you are facing. **7. For every season of suffering there is resurrection power that helps us to be the overcomers the Bible tells that we are in Jesus Christ.** **8. The cross symbolizes dying with Christ but also being raised with Christ.** I am speaking of this life, now. Your day or season of suffering will come to an end. Your resurrection is guaranteed. God's resurrection power lifts you up to overcome and that will happen in God's timetable on this side of heaven. As Christians we are continually overcoming by faith in Jesus the trials and junk this world throws at us. Jesus was on the cross for about six hours and his suffering was over. Your suffering will come to an end and God will raise you anew in His likeness, transforming you to become more like Christ. God asks you to carry your cross so He can change you more and more into His likeness.

To take up one's cross is to remain faithful to Jesus no matter what the cost and no matter how much suffering it might involve. To take up your cross is to experience the resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the cycle of the Christian life, death to sin and raised up by the victorious Jesus Christ. Jesus is Victor.

I have a huge concern for the young people in this church. We have some exceptionally gifted young people in this church who are bright lights in very dark places. We have young people in this church who love Jesus and want to live for Jesus. They have given their lives

over to Jesus and do not want to disappoint Jesus. Due to no fault of their own, some of their peers at school mistreat them, poke fun at them, ostracize them, and are mean to them in ways that hurt deeply. Our Christian young people do not ask to be treated in this way. This world hates the light of Christ and those that live for Christ. So many of our young people are beacons of the light of Christ. At school, on the bus, they are carrying the cross of Christ. What that means for them is they are willing to suffer for Christ as they continue to trust in Christ to help them overcome being mistreated. Young people please keep trusting in Christ in the midst of your pain. The resurrection power of Christ is there to pick you up in God's perfect timing. That is God's guarantee. **Hebrews 12:3 NIV** <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Friends, to this day Satan does not want you to take up your cross. Satan wants you to live for yourself, be your own god, forget about Christ, and forget about living for Christ, and stay away from the church completely. Satan wants you to enjoy all the pleasures of sin in this world and then join him in hell at the end. To take up your cross means you are living for Jesus. It means Satan has lost another soul to Christ. To take up your cross is to lose your life, meaning you no longer live just for yourself. You live for God. To take up your cross is to give your very soul to Christ and yes you will be saved forever and ever. Some people choose to leave the cross alone. They want nothing to do with Jesus and the ways of Jesus. They may become very popular, rich, and more. They can gain the entire world and lose their own soul. Then there is hell to pay.

As I close this sermon I would like to give one practical application to what has been said. To take up your cross is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who always took every opportunity available to speak God's truth. He was the bearer of Good News and so are you. There are a few of you in this congregation who would like to see more young people and more young families in attendance. I quite agree. Jesus wants all to be saved and not one lost to perdition.

**9. All church growth begins with prayer, going to the Throne of Grace, diligently and continually.** All church growth begins with prayer.

1. Please pray for the young person and/or family that you wish would attend church and Sunday school. Please spend deliberate time in prayer for them daily. You are the greatest advertisement to draw people and for some you are the only advertisement.

2. To deny yourself as Jesus asks, is for you to think more about another person's soul than your own life. You have inside of you what every soul needs to hear and understand. Ask God to give to you a heart for the lost. Jesus loves all. The opportunities are everywhere you look. If you wish to grow this church it always begins with prayer.

3. The Gospel is brewing within you just waiting to get out. God's grace can and will work through you as you open your heart filled with God's love to another person who desperately needs what you have. God gives us His grace to save us and for us to give it away. It is called being a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ.

4. And finally, any person that God directs you to speak to already has God working in their life, preparing him or her to hear the truth that you speak. God does all the prework, tending to the person's heart to make it receptive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that will save them for eternity. You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of. Amen and Amen.