The High Demands of Jesus, part 2

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. It flies by fast, doesn't it?

These men who make up the class of 2023, I feel like they just started. I'm amazed because I feel like I just started seeing them come to our class on Sunday afternoons, and two years has flown by so fast.
I'm mindful that for those who are having graduating seniors in a couple of weeks, those 18 years have flown by so fast. Even in my own family, when we moved here in the year 2000, Marcy was pregnant with Benjamin, and now it's his wedding shower.
How did that happen? You have these milestones, and in some ways, you know, life feels slow each day sometimes, and then you just look up and you think, man, time has gone by so fast.
And when you think about how quickly time rolls by, it just reminds me that we want to make the most of every day. In our families, in our homes, we want to enjoy each day.
[1:24] We want to make the most of every Sunday, every week the Lord gives us as a church to gather together. No one is promised tomorrow, and we want to live each day to the fullest and to the glory of God.

And as we get in this season of graduations and Mother's Day and all these special events that take place in the month of May, in some ways, it feels like we just blinked and a whole year went by.
And yet, in the midst of that year, our God has been faithful 10,000 times over. However, we have much to be thankful for. Let me encourage you to turn with me to Mark chapter 8, as we continue our study verse by verse through the gospel of Mark.
And we have come today, we're going to look at just verse 34, and I don't think we're going to get through all of it. And I'm not in a hurry to run by these words, though they are familiar, and most of you could quote them.
This is the heart of the gospel. This is the heart of our church. This is the heart of what it means to follow Christ. And so, I am persuaded to not rush these words that Jesus gives that are so important to understand.
[2:57] Remember the context of what we've covered the last several weeks, Jesus' ancestry of Philippi, an area known for its idolatry and its pagan worship. And Jesus has asked His disciples, who do people say that I am?

And they said, well, some say you're John the Baptist, and some say you're Elijah, and some say you're one of the prophets, some specifically say you're Jeremiah. Then He asked that so important question, but who do you say that I am?
And Peter quickly and boldly makes the assured declaration, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus goes on to say that this has been revealed to you from the Father in heaven. You're right. You're correct understanding who I am, and God has been gracious to reveal this truth to you. And then the Lord says that the next several months are leading to a very specific event that we know as the crucifixion, and He says, I must suffer, I must be rejected, I must be killed, and I must rise again.
And Peter, who just a moment ago boldly declared, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, now foolishly pulls Jesus aside, pulls Him away from the apostles, and says to Him, Lord, this is not going to happen.
[4:35] We're not going down that path. We will not let that happen. Which draws the strongest rebuke imaginable when the Lord says to him in verse 33, get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men.

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The air is thick with tension. People have heard Jesus say this, and now He is speaking like that to not only His apostles, but to the most bold and courageous and outspoken of the apostles.
And all this taking place in Caesarea Philippi, a location where, like anywhere, there could be some believers there, but as a general rule, the people there are pagans, filled with idolatry, not believing in who Jesus is, and now one of His own apostles, one of His closest, have called into question and doubt the very plan of God.
Jesus does not run away from that, He doesn't shy away from that, He's not detracted by that, He will, as He always has done, remain focused on the very reason and purpose for which He has come, namely, to lay down His life as a ransom.
Which brings us to verse 34, that says, And 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.
[6:23] If you've been in church for any length of time, you've heard this, you're familiar with these words, and sometimes with familiarity, we may miss the impact and the depth of them, I'll do my best to help us to consider them carefully.

We're going to look just at verse 34, and as I say, we probably won't get through all of verse 34 even today, because I want you to think carefully and critically with me about the high demands of Jesus.
As we do so, let me just give you a few notes to put down. First, I want you to make note of the crowd. It's very interesting to me in verse 34, who is gathered here to listen to Him.
It says, And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples. Now, just as a reminder, we're in Caesarea Philippi, there is a place known as Caesarea Maritima.
To distinguish from that, Philip the Tertrarch calls this Caesarea to honor Caesar Augustus. It becomes known as Caesarea Philippi eventually.
[7:35] It's a place where the worship of the god Pan took place. It's a wicked, vile place. You can still see today where this took place.

Our group that went to Israel a couple of months ago, we were right there. We were right here in this exact place. You could see the very place where the worship of Pan took place and all the sacrifice that went on there. And it's a people that, by and large, would have been very hostile and unbelieving of the things of Christ.
And in the crowd that Jesus is giving this invitation to, you've got people there who are idolaters. people who worship pagan false gods.
And the invitation he's going to give, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me, that invitation goes out to the crowd, and among the crowd are those who are unbelievers.
And I do think it's very telling how Jesus gave his invitation. He doesn't beg, though he will teach them the truth with great passion.
[8:51] He doesn't soften the demands as if to just to get more people to come with him. He is not concerned with what people think about him in the sense of it's not ever going to make him change the truth.

He's going to speak the truth and declare the truth and invite people to come and to follow him, anyone who would like to. But whether the crowd follows or the crowd rejects will have no bearing on the clarity with which he explains the singular message of the gospel that salvation is found in Jesus Christ and in no other name.
So, if you are a part of the unbelieving, idolatrous, pagan, worshiping people in Caesarea Philippi, here's an invitation he gives to you.
Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. That's how Jesus gave invitations. Clear on the gospel, clear on the demand, clear on the call, and invite anyone to come.
No manipulation, no worry about how the world would view it. That's how Jesus gave an invitation.
[10:20] Anyone who would come after me anyone who would believe in me, anyone who would follow me, you are my disciple. And then he would walk.

And those who believed would follow. Either literally, physically follow him, or if not, literally leaving homes, as some did, with their lives, with their lives, follow him.
In the crowd are unbelievers. Also in the crowd are his own apostles. He calls the crowd to him. Part of that crowd are the apostles that have just heard him with his exchange with Peter.

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11 of the 12 apostles will give evidence they were true believers. Their faith was fragile. Their faith was imperfect.
But in time, they will prove that their faith was genuine. And it's interesting to me that he gives the exact same invitation to his apostles that he gives to the unbelievers in Caesarea Philippi.
[11:32] He's just had this exchange with Peter. Peter's just pulled him aside and said, Lord, we're not going to do this. There's not going to be a cross. You're not going to be suffering. You're not going to be betrayed.

You're not going to be killed. We'll never let that happen. And Jesus turns and it says, he looked at his apostles and he said to Peter, get behind me, Satan.
And he calls the crowd over to him. The apostles come. The crowd gathered around him would gather there. And he's going to say the same thing to the apostles that he says to the idolatrous pagan worshipers.
If anyone would come after me, take up your cross, deny yourself, and follow me. And of course, in the crowd is also one that we know that's an imposter.
Judas Iscariot. In time, he'll give evidence of that. You have no idea in Mark 8 that Judas is a false professor.
[12:35] We don't know that. The apostles don't know that. They don't suspect him. He doesn't look weird, talk weird, act weird. As far as they know, he is as genuine as the rest of them.

But in time, he'll give evidence that he was never truly a believer. What would Jesus say to one who pretends to be a believer and is really not a believer?
Here's what he says. If you would deny yourself and take up your cross, I invite you to come follow me.
To the crowd, outspoken unbeliever, apostle believer, false believer, pretender, he addresses the crowd the exact same way.
If you ever wondered how would Jesus give an invitation, there it is. That's how he would do it. He would call everyone to him that's willing to come. He would allow anybody in, no matter what they looked like, acted like.
[13:46] He wouldn't change the demand of holiness. He wouldn't change what he is saying based on who he's talking to. He wouldn't go soft on the demands of the gospel so that people would like him. He wouldn't go soft on the demands of the gospel so that he might be received better.

He would call everyone to him that's willing to come. He would be clear to them, honest with them, bold with them, straightforward with them, and say to all of them, idolater, believer, false believer, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.
But I want you to notice not only the crowd he speaks to, but now more, even more importantly, look secondly, let's look at the specific invitation he gives. This is his specific invitation.
And he starts, if anyone, pagan, apostle, outcast, someone that everybody assumes is religious, someone who has no training whatsoever, if anyone, this is how he gave an invitation, this is how I give an invitation, if anyone, if any of you would repent and believe, you can be his.
just as in Mark 8, 34, in our congregation this morning, in this sanctuary this morning, there are people in this room, most assuredly, who know Jesus and love him, most assuredly, those who are not believers, and most likely, those who we would all assume are believers, but in your heart, you know, you've never truly converted and given your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.
[15:34] How do I address all those people? I address them the same way Jesus did. If anyone would follow him and believe in him and call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved.

Some of you are here today because you're believers and you love the Lord, and others of you are here today because you're curious and you're trying to see what the Bible teaches, and some of you may be here because somebody made you come, and some may be here because you're pretending to be a believer.
Regardless, my invitation to you today is the exact same invitation that Jesus gave to the crowd 2,000 years ago, and that is, if anyone would come, then follow Christ.
when I meet with somebody and they're telling me their life situation, I don't know if they're a believer.
Sometimes people's life are so steeped in sin, it's impossible for me to know. The Lord knows, but I can't know. Is this a Christian who is just really struggling and straying?

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[16:39] Is this a believer who is for a season just really not obeying as they should? Is this someone who's not converted? Is this somebody who is a false pretender?

I can't know the human heart. So, my response to them is the exact same. No matter where their soul condition may fall, I'm going to call on them to repent and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Because the picture of a believer in the New Testament is someone who is following Jesus. That's what Jesus called His people to do.
If anyone. The invitation goes on. If anyone would come after me. This is the invitation. Walk in His steps.
Go where He leads you. Colossians 2 verse 6 says, Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. If you are a Christian today, I encourage you, keep walking with Him.
[17:46] If you're not a believer, I give you the same invitation. Follow Christ. Walk with Him. And as Jesus says this, He clearly identifies Himself as the only leader unto salvation.

If anyone would come after me. This is singular. This is not salvation by religion. This is salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.
This is not salvation by education. It's not salvation by sincerity. It's not salvation by generosity. This is salvation through Jesus Christ and no one else.
If anyone would come after me. This is what it means to be a disciple. To be a learner.
To be a follower. To be somebody who puts their footprints in the footprints of Christ. This isn't higher level Christianity.
[18:58] This isn't next level Christianity. This is normal biblical Christianity. Here's in the scripture how believers distinguish themselves from the world.

They follow Jesus. Understand that. Because our culture has been decimated by decades of teaching and preaching in churches that tell people that if you just do something something at some kind of formal altar call or if you just respond in some way in some classroom setting that that means you're saved.
That if you just do something then you're in. And there's no life change and there's no transformation and there's no fruit of the spirit and there's no evidence of the Lord at work in their life.
They don't love Christ. They don't love his word. They don't love God's people and they are given assurance Sunday after Sunday that just because you did something when you were a teenager you're good.
They didn't get that from Jesus. And they didn't get it from the New Testament. Because in the New Testament what you see are those who are believers they follow Christ.
[20:23] They follow him. they believe in what he said. They trust in his work on the cross. They have been transformed through the message of the resurrection.

And they're never the same. Not perfect. We still struggle. We still sin. What distinguishes us isn't that we're perfect. It's that we follow Christ.
My friends, if you're wondering today are you truly a believer, here's the question for you. Do you love Christ and are you following him?
That's the question. I believe with all of my heart in what we know is the eternal security of the believer. I believe in all of my heart that someone who is a Christian will persevere to the end and you cannot lose your salvation.
I believe that with all of my heart. but I do not believe that just because you did something 20 years ago that didn't change you, that didn't impact, that didn't transform you, that that means you're saved.
[21:31] True salvation is someone who does what Christ calls them to do, namely deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow him. What are you trusting in today?

How do you know if you're a Christian? With all of my heart I believe if you're a believer you will never lose your salvation. You can't lose that which is eternal salvation.
But there's a lot of people that put their trust and their faith in something less than true conversion being saved by grace through faith.
If anyone would come after me, it means your decision making becomes radically kingdom first mindset.
Come after me, follow me, believe in me, do what I do, do what I call you to do, get behind me. Christ is the leader, we are behind him. One of the ways you know that you really are a believer is

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your life is dominated by this thought of what does Christ ask of me?
[22:48] so many people go through their life, they don't want hell, nobody would, they want heaven, everybody would, and their thought in so many cases is, I just want enough of Jesus so I can slide into heaven.

I want the world, I love the world, I want to be like the world, I want to gain what the world offers, I really want to be of the world, I just want enough Jesus that the very end when I die, I can slide into heaven, that's not what Jesus invites people to do, this is radical abandonment to follow him, if anyone would come after me, will you come after Jesus?
Jesus. We saw the crowd, we saw the invitation, the invitation is come after me, leads us thirdly to the demands, and they are high.
First, let him deny himself. What does that mean? The word deny means to separate, to abandon, to renounce.
You say, can you give me a picture in the Bible of what this word would mean? I can. Think with me, we'll get here in a few months in Mark 14. Remember the night that Jesus arrested when Peter denies Christ?
[24:26] Three times? Aren't you the one that's with Jesus? I don't know him. Are you sure? You sound like the one who was with him. I don't know him.

A third time, are you sure you're not one of his followers? And calling down curses, Peter says, I do not know him. What's he doing? He's denouncing any connection with Jesus.
He is saying, I am separating myself. self. That's the word used. But in true conversion, what you are denying and abandoning is your old self.
If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself. It's a completely new way of life. You're denying not some thing, you're denying someone, namely the old you.
Conversion is, the old me is no more. I'm a new creation. I have a new goal. It's not myself. It's the glory of Christ. I have a new mindset.
[25:43] It's not things of the world. It's things above. I have a new definition of joy. I seek new treasures, not the treasure of the world, but I seek eternal treasures.

I have a new way that I view suffering. I'm no longer afraid to suffer because the purpose of life is not my comfort or ease. It's the glory of Christ. And whatever brings glory to his name is my highest joy.
That's what it means to deny yourself. And Jesus says, if anyone would have come after me, his invitation is to anyone.
Our invitation today is to anyone. The gift of salvation is free, but the change is so radical you will be willing to give up everything.
To follow Jesus is to have a completely new way of life. Salvation is not adding Jesus to your life. Salvation is not I'm the same person and I just add Sunday morning, I just add Sunday school, I just add a quiet time.
[26:59] Salvation is I'm a new creation. I have a new leader. It's not me anymore. It's the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't seek Jesus to help me satisfy my agenda and my goals.

I have denied, I have abandoned those goals for a whole new way of life that says whatever Christ wants, that's what I want. Whatever he calls me to do, that's what I want to do.
Wherever he leads, I will go. That is the New Testament picture of conversion. And that invitation goes to everyone. If anyone would come after me, here's what you do.
You deny yourself. if you're a Christian today, keep denying yourself. Because that's what a believer does.
If you're not a believer today, I give you the exact same invitation Jesus gave that day. If anyone, that includes you, would decide to come after him and believe in him, then give evidence of that by denying yourself.
[28:22] You say, that's a pretty high demand. He's just getting started. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, here's the second part of the demand, and take up his cross.

Take up his cross. This is really radical. In fact, in Luke's account, in chapter 9, he adds a word that Jesus says here, take up your cross daily, every day.
It doesn't mean you have to get resaved every day, that you could get resaved every day, it's just saying that those who are truly in Christ, those who are truly believers, give evidence of this, that this is a day after day after day way they live.

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Salvation is not that when you're 14, you had some emotional stirring at camp and you went forward to some invitation of some kind and you felt kind of warm and you felt all good inside and then you had no life change, no transformation, no new affections, and you live the same life you always lived before but you hope in something that happened years ago that never changed you in the first place.
That's not salvation. Take up your cross daily. Why? Because true conversion, true salvation impacts your life every single day.
[29:55] So if anyone would come after me let him abandon himself and let him take up his cross and Luke adds daily.

I don't know if we can fully grasp how this would have been heard in the first century. When we think about a cross we think about a fairly clean almost safe sacrifice of Jesus.
The pictures of crosses we see are pretty clean. When we wear a cross as jewelry it's clean. The crosses we have outside in our property are clean.
if you're a first century person under the Roman government and somebody says take up your cross here's what you heard that's an instrument of death.
Gory graphic violent sadistic the reason they crucified is for two things.
[31:29] It caused extreme pain and extreme humiliation. And you know why they crucified? Because it generally took a long time for someone to die from crucifixion.

You look through the centuries most people have any kind of capital punishment. I mean look through the years of our nation electric chair lethal injection even in other parts of the world where they would have the guillotine all of these things while maybe graphic and heart wrenching they're designed to have quick death not crucifixion.
It was supposed to take a long time. Much more painful. the normal way people would die from crucifixion is they would just be left hanging there and wild animals would come and devour them or they would die by asphyxiation.
They would suffocate to death because they weren't able to get a breath. You have to push down on the nails to get your lungs up to get a breath and the pain was so great you! would die asphyxiation or animals would come and devour you.
If you're in the first century and you hear somebody say take up your cross you're not thinking well that's just my cross to bear I've got an old car that's my cross to bear my mother-in-law lives with me that's our cross to bear no no no no take up your cross was an invitation to die to die to your old self because salvation makes you a new creation if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me as best I can I want to give the same invitation every Lord's day that the Lord Jesus gave I want to be clear on the gospel clear on the demand free on the offer and say for anyone who would believe follow him follow him why would anybody deny themselves because they've come to the place where they realize they'll never find joy and happiness without
[34:11] Christ why would anybody take up their cross daily because they've come to a place where they realize real life is found in trusting Jesus Christ that's the beautiful work the Holy Spirit does as he opens blind eyes and he causes dead hearts to beat again with life with faith through the work of grace and so I say to you today if any of you would want to be Christ's disciple deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus and you say but this sounds like it might be a life of sacrifice absolutely you say well this sounds like if they follow Jesus their life on earth might get worse not better absolutely you say but I thought following Jesus meant life got pretty easy and pretty simple and you just prayed a prayer and everything kind of went good and you!

good! about life and you! you didn't get cancer and your spouse doesn't hurt your feelings and your kids always do what you wanted to do and everybody treats you right I don't know where you got that you didn't get that from living in this world but if you've come to the place to where you say I'm at the end there's nothing of this world that can satisfy me and I recognize that one day I'm going to take a final breath and then what and the money of the world won't help me in that moment and the fame of the world won't help me in that moment and my resume won't help me in that moment I need someone who on my last day is strong enough to call me home and to lead me to where he is and if you're looking for that kind of hope and salvation and security then I say to you if anyone if anyone would come after him abandon yourself die to yourself and follow
Jesus there's more that needs to be said about this demand we'll pick it up next week Lord thank you today for your word and I pray even this moment for those who need to give their life to you that

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this moment as I intercede and pray for them that this moment they would call upon the name of the Lord in their heart confess their sin turn from their unbelief and by an act of grace through your Holy Spirit be saved I pray for those in our congregation today who are true believers that this would remind them of the importance of obedience every day I pray Lord for those who are not believers who may be curious at some level that today while the gospel has been explained they would understand that while the demands are high the offer is free the gift is for them if they would but repent and believe and call upon your name
I pray Lord this morning for those who are not believers but we would assume they were that like Judas in that crowd that none of us would suspect that their faith isn't genuine but in their heart they know they've never truly repented I pray that even this day would be the day that you would use to awaken them from their spiritual slumber and call them to life true life real life everlasting life not pretend not charade but real conversion may that happen even today and Lord may it be of us that we believed and that we followed that the world around us could tell our faith was genuine because we persevered in denying ourselves taking up our cross and following you every single day to the glory of
Christ may that be true in his name amen church we want to help you you may have a question about how to follow up maybe today is the day you've given your life to Jesus and you need someone to meet with you to help you to learn how do I grow in my walk with Christ how do I read the Bible we want to help you with that it may be that today you've got someone that you're praying for to come to know Christ and you want someone to join with you in praying by name for them to be believers we would love to pray with you and pray for your friend for any of you use that connection card let us know your question let us know your need let us know how we the faith perhaps you're a believer you've never been baptized and you would like to speak with someone about baptism use that connection card let us know how we can minister to you we want to help you we want to lead you we want to walk together beside you as we together follow
[39:58] Jesus let us know how we can help you on the way out take that connection card and put it in one of our giving boxes if you are a guest with us we don't ask you to put any money in the giving box we don't want your money at all today but we would love to know that you are here and so if you would give us that connection card we'll pray for you and for member or guest if there is a way we can help you or serve you make note of that in the connection card all right finally gentlemen four o'clock today fellowship center is our interest meeting for the institute if you're interested in learning more about it and are considering enrolling come today four o'clock there's information right here at the ministry connection there's a sign up to come to the meeting there's some handouts there I'd love to see at four o'clock ladies one week from Tuesday ladies night of theology it's going to be the biggest one we've had we want you to be a part of it 630 to 830 one week from Tuesday make note of that evening service five o'clock tonight we continue our study through the armor of

God we've had great crowds coming on Sunday nights come and join us at five o'clock tonight as we learn about the shield of faith I think we have as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as thing

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