The High Demands of Jesus, part 1

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[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. With me to Mark chapter 8, as we continue in our study here, we're looking at, last Sunday, we looked at really just part of verse 34, familiar words to us where it says, 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.

Just by way of reminder for those who are with us, and if you weren't with us last week to catch you up just a bit, we're looking here in verse 34, and today, Lord willing, down through verse 37.
With a few headings. First, we noticed the crowd, and we looked at last week that in the crowd that Jesus invites to come and listen to Him, some of them are just the curious, they're just the bystanders, just the people who were there.
But Jesus in verse 34 says, If anyone, and so He invites anyone to listen to Him. In verse 34, He called the crowd to Him. And so, as Jesus speaks, you've got the crowd, just the curious, just the passers-by who are there.
Also a part of the crowd, verse 34 tells us, are the disciples. And so you've got the core, the committed who are there with Him. And with the disciples, we know that one of them, Judas Iscariot, is an imposter.
[1:38] He's not a real believer. No one knows that yet, as far as the disciples. They don't know that one of their own is a fraud. They have no reason to suspect that He is.

But right there in the midst of this crowd, what we find are the curious, and the committed, and the imposter, no different than any Sunday morning gathering in any church in any town, where a number of the people who gather are committed, and others are just curious and checking it out. And perhaps some, sadly, pretend to be believers and aren't truly converted. That's the crowd that's gathered there. And as the crowd gathers, Jesus gives an invitation.
That's the second thing we looked at. First was the crowd. Second was the invitation. And the invitation begins, if anyone. He gives the same invitation to the disciples that He gives to the crowd, the same invitation to the committed that He gives to the imposter.
No matter who you are, no matter your status, no matter your standing, no matter what you've done, what you believe, if anyone would come after me, that's the invitation.
[2:59] To follow Him. To come after Him. To align yourself behind Him. He's the Lord. He's the leader. We're His followers.

If anyone would come after me. That's His invitation. To the religious, would you come after Him? To the one who has been raised in church your whole life, would you come after Him?
To the one whose family is broken, would you come after Him? To the one who's an outcast? To the one who has wealth and popularity?
To the one who is young and strong? To the one who is old and dying? If anyone would come after me. This is the invitation He gives.
Third, we looked last week at the demands. And they are high. Unashamedly high.
[4:10] If anyone would come after me, three things. First, let him deny himself. Deny himself.

Jesus did not come to fulfill your dreams. He did not come to make your agenda possible. Salvation is offered freely, but you give all of yourself to Christ.
You deny yourself. There's a new master. There's a new Lord. There's a new Savior. There's a new boss. There's a new leader in your life. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, second, and take up his cross.
Luke 9 adds that when Jesus says this, He says, take up your cross daily. True conversions once for all. But it's lived out in day after day, surrender to the Lord.

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Deny himself and take up his cross. A lot of times people throw that term around rather loosely. [5:28] I mentioned last week that a bad car is not your cross to bear. I mentioned last week that someone in your family that frustrates you isn't your cross to bear.

That would be taking what that means so lightly. When Jesus says, deny yourself and take up your cross daily, to take up your cross is nothing less than an invitation not just to deny yourself, but to die to yourself.
Crucifixion was something the Romans did as an instrument of death. In Jesus' lifetime, scholars and historians tell us, as many as 30,000 people were crucified.
It was done because it inflicted the most amount of embarrassment, the way it would take place, and the most amount of pain.
Most of the executions we know about in our lifetime are done for quick death, not crucifixion. [6:41] The goal was not quick death. The goal was excruciating death. The goal was to inflict as much pain, as much suffering, as much embarrassment, as much shame on the victim as possible.

And when Jesus says, take up your cross, what everybody would have heard in his day is this is an invitation to die to myself.
It was an awful way to die. In fact, according to Roman law in the first century, only with a rare exception would a Roman citizen be crucified.
It was reserved for just the absolute worst of citizens and primarily for those in other lands that Rome controlled.
To say that someone is being crucified is to say that somebody's life is finished. If the government said, you will be crucified on Thursday, then what you knew until Thursday is you were a dead man walking.
[8:00] And it was going to be the most gory, graphic, awful way to die. They would take the upright stake, put it in place.

They would take the cross beam called the patibulum that the victim would typically carry across their shoulders to the site of the crucifixion. To take up your cross was an invitation to die.
So when Jesus says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily is to say, anyone that wants to be mine, come on, but just understand this.
While the gift of salvation is free, it will cost you everything. You're not going to be saved by a work that you do. It's the free gift of God to those who believe. But for those who believe, they will give evidence, proof that they really are surrendered to Christ, and the way they will prove it is that they will die to themselves every single day.
In our culture, even though we talk about the cross and the crucifixion, as I mentioned last week, it's typically a very sanitized version. Crosses are, in our world, more decorative.
[9:22] In the first century, you didn't decorate with a cross. Because if you ever saw a cross, it was bloody, and it was graphic.

And the sounds that would come from the ones being crucified that eventually would die were horrific. And in the first century, if a man from your village left walking out with a band of Roman soldiers, and that man from your village was carrying a cross, here's what you knew.
He's never coming back. His life is over. You need to hear these words the way that Jesus' hearers would have heard them.
If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily. It's saying that the person I was is no longer who I am.
That to follow Jesus is to say, who I am now is a total, complete, new creation. To follow Jesus is to value Christ more than you value your own life.
[10:47] That's conversion. 150 years ago, J.C. Ryle wrote these words, Nothing has done more harm to Christianity than the practice of filling the ranks of Christ's army with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession and talk fluently of his experience.

It has been painfully forgotten that numbers alone do not make strength, and that there may be a great quantity of mere outward religion while there is very little of real grace.
Let us all remember this. Let us keep back nothing from young professors and inquirers after Christ. Let us not enlist them on false pretenses.
Let us tell them plainly that there is a crown of glory at the end, but let us tell them no less plainly that there is a daily cross in the way.

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That's the gospel. True conversion brings total commitment. And so the demands are deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and now let's continue on this morning with the third at the end of verse 34, and follow me.
[12:15] Follow me. Both of these words are so important for our understanding. Follow me. First, the word follow. The word to follow him.

If you follow somebody, you walk in their steps. If you play follow the leader, you're mimicking the one who's in front of you. If you follow somebody, you're walking the same direction they go.
If you're following someone in the car, you're taking the same route they're going. When Christ says, follow me, he's saying, walk this way. But it's not just follow, it's follow me.
It's not just be committed, it's be committed to follow Christ. It's not just be religious, it's to follow Christ. To follow is to say we are actively moving.
To follow him is to fix our eyes on Jesus. This is a distinct direction following a particular person.
[13:13] This is what it means to be a Christian. Somebody says to you, what does it mean to be a Christian? Here's what you tell them. To be a Christian means my life is completely sold out to one person, namely Jesus Christ and following him.

It's what it means to be a believer. Luke 6, 46, the Lord says, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you? To be a believer is to follow him.
It's not just to have a religious part of your life. It's not just to enjoy singing a few religious songs. To be a believer is to follow Christ.
Nothing less than that. True conversion is total commitment. When Jesus says, follow me, it's the same word that you heard in John 10, 27, when Jesus said this, my sheep know my voice and I know them and they follow me.
This is not a strange teaching of Jesus. He was clear. He was consistent on this. True conversion means you follow Christ. 1 Peter 2, 21, for to this you have been called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.
[14:45] This is what Jesus is inviting the crowd to. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Follow, move, obey, respond. And you follow him. It's moving in a very direct place following a particular person.
It's doing what Christ has called us to do, believing who Christ is. And so when Jesus at the Great Commission in Matthew 28 says, go into all the nations, we follow him, we obey him, we go into all the nations.
That's why we send groups from our church around the world on mission trips. That's why we invite our church members to give regularly because through your giving, you're able to go into all the world.
You're able to support missionaries and support church planters literally all around the world with your giving. When he says go, let's go.
[16:03] Let's go physically. Let's go with our prayers. Let's go with our generous giving. Go into all the world. Follow him. But he also says, and behold, I am with you.

That's important. That the Great Commission is not just about you going, it's about you going, but the Lord is with you. That's why Jesus says, follow me.
There's obedience, but there's also a personal connection to Christ. Follow me. You're with him. He is with you. And so this is the invitation.
If anyone would come, here's the demands. Deny yourself. Take up your cross daily. And follow me.
It's so interesting. When you look at the way Jesus gave an invitation, there was truth explained. There was honesty taught.
[17:02] There was the invitation to follow him. What you don't see is in any way Christ lowering the standard, lowering the demands just to get more followers.

What you don't see is Jesus trying to play up some false emotionalism. I mean, he doesn't make this invitation and turn around to Peter and say, do you have the fog machine going?
We need to plug that in just about here at the end. There's no manipulation. There's an honest call. And the call is this.
If anyone would come after me, my disciples, the fraud, the curious, the religious, the idolater, the pagan, if anyone would come after me, you'd die to self.

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You don't add a little Jesus to your life. You leave your life. And you become a new creation.
[18:18] And you follow him. What our nation has seen in the last 30 years or so is this emotional, often largely manipulative appeal to people's emotions.

Let's just get them signed up. Let's just get them on the team. Just give them a jersey. Don't worry if they understand the gospel. Don't worry if they're clear on the demands of the gospel.
Let's just, let's make them like us. Let's get them on our side. Let's not talk about the demands of the gospel.
Let's not talk about the cost of following Jesus. Let's just kind of play up the good stuff. Let's get as many people to make some kind of a commitment as we can because it makes us look bad if they don't.
And let's get as many people in the building as we can because it makes us feel good when that happens. Let's, let's water down the demands of following Christ. Certainly, let's water down the demands of being a member of a local assembly.
[19:30] And let's just turn this into a country club. And you come if you want to come. And you just give if you want to give. And you serve if you want to serve. And if you don't, you just, you just do your thing.

We'll be here if you want us. And you run that about two generations worth. And you get exactly what our nation has become.
Religious, unconverted largely, church members. people that responded to something much different than the kind of invitation Jesus gave.
Demands that were watered down or ignored altogether just to attract a crowd. R.C.H. Linsky said these amazing words.
Speaking of someone who follows based on a temporary emotional buzz and then is no more. He said, such a person sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms, and the glittering arms and is eager to join forgetting the exhausting marches the bloody battles and the graves perhaps unmarked.
[21:07] Not with Jesus. He makes it clear. You want to be mine? Come on. Salvation is free.

You do nothing to earn it. You do nothing to deserve it. I'm going to go to the cross in your place. I'm going to die in your place. I'm going to pay for your sin.
What is true of me, perfect righteousness, will be credited to your account because you believe in me by faith. I save you by grace. Nothing that you do, none of your works. But if that's what you want, here's what it's going to cost you.
you're going to do it. You're going to do it. You're going to do it. You're going to deny yourself. You're going to take up your cross daily. And you're going to follow me.
And it will likely not lead to a road of ease or comfort. It will be a life of sacrifice and in most parts of the world for most of history, significant persecution.
[22:19] And one day, when they take your life or crucify you on a cross or sever your head, you will be able to say to live as Christ and to die is gain.

The ultimate gain. Not because of what you got on this earth, but because of what awaits you in heaven.
The call to follow Jesus is not a call to fame and it's not a call to comfort. It's a call to surrender. It's a call to die to self. And it's a call to follow Jesus. And perhaps even this morning, some of you here in this very sanctuary know that you are a sinner unable to save yourself and as you think of the gospel offer of Jesus Christ, maybe even this very moment, you know in your heart that you ought to confess your sin and commit to surrendering your life and following Christ.
And I want to encourage you and warn you with this. Beware of having this stirring in your heart and denying the steps of obedience. Because what happens are people who feel this buzz in a church service or this buzz at a youth camp or this buzz on a mission trip, whatever it may be, and they don't follow with total surrender to Christ, they get used to substituting emotion for obedience.
[24:16] And the road to hell is paved that way. Don't do it. Instead, if you hear Him calling you to salvation through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, even this morning, surrender your life to Christ.

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. That's the invitation He gave. That's the invitation we give.

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There is a road that leads to everlasting life. There is a road that leads to peace and joy and forgiveness. There is a path that leads to ultimate joy and satisfaction, but it's not measured in worldly comforts.
It's measured by knowing and loving Christ. Now, some may say, who would take that invitation? I mean, Jesus says, if you want to come after me, you've got to deny yourself, take up your cross every day, die to myself. Who would ever do that?
[25:34] Well, let me give you a fourth thing we see in this text, and it's the reasoning. Here's the reasoning why we urge you even this day to follow Christ.

Verse 35, for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospels will save it.
For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?
Make note of a few things here in the reasoning of why you should follow Christ and what it means to follow Christ. Number one, true freedom comes through full surrender to Jesus.
True freedom comes through full surrender to Jesus. I know this is counter cultural. I know this is counter intuitive. I know it feels like that the way to have true freedom is to be your own boss, but here's the truth of life, that true freedom is found only in full surrender to Jesus.
[26:52] These are his words. For whoever would save his life will lose it. Now, just look here in verse 35 and 36, verse 37, look at the kind of terms he uses.

Save, lose, forfeit, exchange. He's talking about the metaphor of marketplace. To put it just kind of in a loose vernacular, what kind of deal is this?
When the world says be your own boss, the world says control your own fate, the world says it's so desirable to have no one over you, but the scripture says true freedom comes through full surrender.
And Jesus says if you try to save your life, if you try to be in charge of your life, if you try to be the boss of your life, you're going to lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.
when I was a child, my parents got this invitation to go.
[28:10] We drove, it seems like a couple of hours to go somewhere, and I think it was probably a timeshare thing, something like that, and the invitation in the mail said that if you come listen to this, I think it was a timeshare, if you come listen to this pitch, then you're guaranteed to get one of three things, and this was, man, this was, I don't know, 45 years ago probably, that was so young, I remember it really well though, they said something like you would get either a bunch of cash, a big screen TV, or a boat.

Well, how could you go wrong? So we packed up in the car, and we drove to this, y'all remember this? If I'm lying, tell me here, just after the service, not probably that'd be embarrassing, but we drove a couple of hours and sat all day long to this pitch, all day long, and we kept thinking, I mean, but when this is over, okay, so we're going to get a boat, okay, I mean, there's no water in South Oklahoma City, but we'll go find some water, that'd be good, or we're going to get a big screen TV, that's great, or we're going to get a bunch of cash, it's great, and we listened, my parents listened, I didn't listen, and we didn't sign up for the timeshare, or whatever it was, and we took home our gift, the boat, a.k.a.
a raft, like a blow-up pool air mattress, as I recall. It's using the term boat quite loosely.
It seemed like the deal was too good to be true. You know why? Because it was. And if you're talking about one day's afternoon, and a little bit of driving, maybe it's worth the risk.
I'll tell you what's infinitely much more serious, are people who take the risk to say, I'll get serious about Jesus later.
[30:29] He offers me heaven, he offers me eternal life, he offers me forgiveness, sounds like a great deal, I'll think about that later. Or, even worse, people who think that 80 years on this earth of living for themselves and living it up is what's going to really make them happy, when in reality, they're going to have an eternity of judgment if they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who would make that deal? Jesus says it plainly. Whoever would save his life, if you want to save your life in a worldly sense, if you don't want to deny yourself, you don't want to take up your cross, you don't want to follow me, you don't want sacrifice, you don't want persecution, you just want to save your life here on this earth, that one will lose it.
But the one who loses his life, denies himself, takes up his cross, his life will be saved.

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The one who desires to cling to his life will lose his life, and the one who gives control of his life over to Christ will have everlasting life.
Why? Because, as the text says, whoever loses his life for my sake, and the gospels will save it. Whoever loses his life for my sake, and the gospels will save it.
[32:04] He begins by saying, if anyone would come after me, and then he says, for whoever loses his life will save it. Secondly, the treasures of eternity far outweigh the fleeting joys of this world.

The treasures of eternity far outweigh the fleeting joys of this world. I get that from verse 36.
For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? In other words, if it were possible for you to gain the whole world, what if all the money and all the fame and all the material possessions you could ever own, what if you really, truly had it all?
I mean, we look at people and say, man, they have it all, but in reality, they don't have anything close to all. I mean, even you take someone who is quite wealthy.
They may have a lot of money, but nowhere close to all. I don't know who you know that has the largest house, but whatever the largest house you know that somebody owns, and you look at their house and think, man, they've got the biggest house.
[33:36] I mean, their house is so small compared to all the other houses. Whoever you know that has a lot of money in the bank has the tiniest, tiniest fraction compared to all the money in the world.

And Jesus says, what would it profit you if you gained the whole world? If you had everything, all the power, all the money, all the material possessions, all the land, all the house, what if you had everything?
You say, that'd be pretty good. And I suppose it would for a few years. And then when you die, your soul is unconverted.
And you have zero minus ten billion. You've got nothing. What would it profit a man if he truly could gain the whole world but not have Christ?
Verse 37, what can a man give in return for his soul? Just imagine the scene. You've got some rich individual, did not believe in Christ, did not love Christ, did not follow Christ, lived it up for worldly possessions, and was quite good at it.
[35:30] Had all the money, all the prestige, all the notoriety. Everybody that knows this person on planet earth wishes they were that person.

And that very person dies, stands before the Lord in judgment because of their sin. And Jesus says, what can a man give in return for his soul?
You have no bargaining power when you stand before the Lord. When you have rejected the salvation that he offered you because you thought a few years of chasing this world had more value than the eternal glory of the eternal God, there's nothing you can give in exchange for your soul.
I think about Demas in 2 Timothy 4.10 where Paul says, for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me.
He's a guy on a mission trip. He's a guy who's doing what it looked like believers did. He seemed to be genuine.
[36:57] He seemed to be the real thing. And yet, he loved the world. He knew the cost. He knew the offer.

And he decided to sell his soul, as it were, to chase the world. And he deserted the cause of Christ.
And what will that man give in exchange for his soul? Go back to verse 34.
calling the crowd to him with his disciples. He said to them, if anyone would come after me. This was the way Jesus gave an invitation.
You're going to have to deny yourself. You're going to have to take up your cross. You're going to have to follow me. You're going to have to give up control of your life. You're going to have to live with eternity in view, not today in view.
[38:05] And you're going to have to make the eternal standing of your soul your priority. If invitations like that were given more often, churches would have a lot less pretenders.

Some would say, maybe even some of you today would say, that's the demand of the gospel. I'm out. I thought being a Christian meant life was kind of easy.
I thought being a Christian meant that I got my way. I thought being a Christian meant I didn't really get sick. I thought being a Christian meant the tornado skips over my house. I thought being a

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Christian meant things would get better.
You're telling me if I follow Christ, things could get harder? Things could get worse? Suffering could get more intense? Persecution could take my life? And Jesus says, absolutely.
Who would do that? Who would sign up for that? The one who understands that life on earth is a vapor, here today, gone tomorrow, and eternity is forever.
[39:23] The one who understands that the joys of this world are fleeting.

They're small. They're temporary. It's a mirage. And the joys of heaven are eternal.
Who would sign up for that? The one who understands he can't save himself.
And neither can his job. And neither can his 401K. And neither can his friends. But there is one, Jesus, who laid down his life, who suffered and died in our place, so that any who would believe in him would be saved and have everlasting life.
Where the Lord today keeps and protects your eternal reward, where thieves cannot break in and moth and rust cannot destroy, an inheritance preserved for you, where great is your reward in heaven.
[40:50] And I say today, what Jesus said 2,000 years ago, if anyone would come after him, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Jesus, going a distinct direction, following a particular person, because true conversion is total commitment, and you follow him, and it leads you home one day to heaven, to glory, where every desire of your heart has been met perfectly and supremely forever and forever.

Many of you that have been in church for a while know the words of a lady named Ray Miller. You may not know her name, but you know her poem.
You know it because a well-known singer named George Beverly Shea took a poem that his mother left at a piano, and he took that poem and created music for it.
And if you've grown up in the church like me, you've sung this song many times. It says, I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold.
I'd rather be his than have riches untold. I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land. And I'd rather be led by his nail-pierced hand.
[42:26] I'd rather have that than to be a king of a vast domain and to be held in sin's dread sway. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.

teenager, child, adult, hear clearly the invitation from the Lord Jesus Christ today.
If anyone would come after him, deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Jesus.
Don't seek to save your life according to the world standards, because if you do, you'll lose it. Be willing to lose your life according to the world standards and save it.
Because if you don't, one day you will stand in front of the judge, and what will you give in exchange for your soul? And the answer is, there's nothing to give in that moment.
[43:43] The path to life and the path to true joy is found in the footprints of following Jesus.

Jesus. And if today you sense the Lord speaking to your heart through his word, let this day be the day that you follow Christ.
Surrender your life to him. And say, as the hymn writer said, you'd rather have Jesus in anything this world can give.
Lord, we thank you for your word and pray that you would use it to lead us into truth and understanding and to help us to follow you.
We thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the clear invitation from scripture. And pray that our answer would be wherever you lead, we will go.
[45:00] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. A couple of things before you leave this morning. di biotech was an Thank you for the love and for the love and we don't your love and there's just eep in this show to you in this videotape you and it's that's for the love and it's for the love and and that's we go and that's for the love and that's for the love and fathers in this place and it's for the end and fathers fathers fathers fathers G or themIA

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