

“UNASHAMED”

Text: Mark 8:34-38

Sunday, December 29, 2019 | Pastor Kevin Thiessen

TITLE SLIDE Shane Claiborne wrote in his book *Irresistible Revolution*, ‘People often ask me what Mother Teresa was like. . . sometimes it’s like they wonder if she glowed in the dark or had a halo. She was short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even a little ornery, like a beautiful, wise old granny. But there is one thing I will never forget – her feet. Her feet were deformed.

Each morning I would stare at them. I wondered if she had contracted leprosy. One day a Sister explained, “Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone, and Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair, so she digs through and finds them. And years of doing that have deformed her feet.” Years of loving her neighbour as herself deformed her feet.’

When people are asked about the person whose life they most admire, often the answer is ‘Mother Teresa’. She made the most of her life. It is a paradox, because her life was a life of self-denial, taking up her cross and following Jesus. She unashamedly gave her whole life to honor Jesus and love others.

Life is an extraordinary and wonderful gift. In the Bible we are continually urged not to waste this gift, but instead to make the most of our lives.

As read for us this morning, in Mark 8:35, Jesus gives us a paradox: in order to make the most of your life, you have to give it away. Jesus says that ‘whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me *and* for the gospel will save it’ (8:35).

My aim this morning is to unpack this for us. How do we actually do this? Is it worth it? Does it really work? I chose the title “Unashamed” because if we are going to obey Jesus’ instruction then this is a life to be lived out loud . . . not quietly, tucked away in our tight religious corner, but out loud, joyfully making the most of our lives and sharing the greatest news we’ve ever heard.

Consistently throughout my life, some of the most distinctive, powerful, affirming, inspiring moments happen when someone comes to faith or declares their allegiance to Jesus in the waters of baptism.

I think part of the reason these experiences are so powerful is due to the simplicity of new faith. It’s unashamed, crystal clear, and unhindered.

In 2019, Central has had 24 baptisms! That is incredible. I have been blown away because of the diversity by which Jesus is drawing people to himself. We have seen and heard testimonies from children, teens, young adults, middle-aged and even 89-year old Anson Patterson. We have seen and heard testimonies from those coming out of Muslim, New Age, Nihilistic and Atheistic backgrounds. We have some who’ve been away from Christ for long periods of time and have now returned. We’ve seen poor and rich, young and old, across cultures, ethnicities and ages. So, for me this has been a truly an incredible year to be a part of what God is doing.

Every testimony I hear offers a fresh encouragement and reminder of how God is at work in each person’s life. It also reminds me of the core theme of our Scripture today . . . both of the cost of following Jesus and the call to live unashamed.

Sadly, it has become far too common in Canada for Christians to become quiet and reserved citizens. We don’t want to offend anyone, so in an increasingly hostile environment, we too often sit idly by, holding the greatest news the world could ever hear within the confines of our buildings and homes.

So, today I believe our scripture offers a clear counter to that trend. Friends and family, as we close out 2019 and head into 2020, let’s wake up! Let’s stop grumbling about the societal changes that are increasingly inconveniencing us and let’s fix our eyes, hearts and minds on God’s Word so that we can be reminded of the cost Jesus laid out for us from the very beginning. Stop reducing your relationship to Jesus and his gospel to a set of practices and rituals . . . and recapture an ever-deepening relationship of love, trust

and obedience that rekindles a boldness to live unashamed, unafraid, unapologetic lives that joyously declare what Jesus has done in our lives! C'mon – the world is so loud about sin! When will we be loud about salvation? We have been saved, set free, redeemed!

I was inspired recently by a Miami pastor named Rich Wilkerson Jr as he challenged his church. He declared, “We live in a day and age where the reason people can't see Jesus inside of us is because we live so quiet, so timid, so afraid, so by our feelings. We're more addicted to getting “lit” (personally impacted or excited) than we are to being the light.

This morning, some of you may be new to the church. I want to make it clear, you can belong here before you believe in Jesus – in fact we want you to come with all of your questions and we're thrilled to have a chance to help you discover and learn about who Jesus is, what He taught and what it looks like to follow Him.

But as Wilkerson proclaimed to his church, “Following Jesus is not a trend! Following Jesus is a call . . . it's a decision to first die to your self so that you might find true life. Jesus did not come for a religion . . . he came to establish a long, lasting, vibrant, real relationship with you – because he loves you and he has a purpose for each and every one of you.”

Our Scripture for today lays out how we discover this purpose so that we might close out 2019 and wake up and get on board with what Jesus has for us in 2020.

SLIDE 2 First, to live an unashamed life, Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial.

In context, earlier in Mark 8 the disciples have *finally* understood who Jesus is. Mark notes Peter's answer to Jesus's question “Who do you say I am?” Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ’ (v.29). Christ was the title associated with the anticipated “anointed One” – the Messiah – the one who would save the people of Israel. Up to this point in Mark, he has recorded the evidence of Jesus's identity – he has taught with authority, he has healed the sick, shown power over nature and even over death. Now, the disciples are finally understanding Jesus's identity, so he immediately shifts to now focus them on his mission.

Jesus begins to speak about the cross (Mark 8:31). See, we can't understand the cross unless we understand who Jesus is. His teaching is so paradoxical, counterintuitive and surprising that Peter takes him aside to rebuke him (v.32).

Keep your Bibles open and look a few verses earlier in Mark 8:22, we see a parallel here with the healing of the blind man. The healing acts as a visual parable of the gradual eye-opening of the disciples. First, Peter's eyes are opened about Jesus' identity (v.29). However, he only half-understood. He did not yet see Jesus' mission (vv.31–32). Peter can ‘see’, but he can't fully ‘see’.

Jesus has to explain to his disciples the extraordinary paradox involved in making the most of our lives – of which he is to show the supreme example. He says if you want to make the most of your life, you have to abandon your life to his service and the gospel. The words ‘deny yourself’ mean *saying no to yourself*. The Christian life involves the challenge of daily denial. The world thinks that the way to life is to not deny yourself anything. Yet Jesus says that the opposite is true. The way to *find life* is to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him.

It was critical that the disciples understood Jesus's identity, otherwise they could not grasp the conditions of following Jesus's way to live. One way to illustrate this is the game “Follow the Leader” Every child playing the game knows there is only one rule, you follow to any place where the leader has first gone. Ultimately, for the Christian, this following of Jesus becomes the hope of heaven, since our leader has already gone there (Heb. 6:19–20): but first comes the cross.

SLIDE 3 To make this even more practical, self-denial means letting go of self-determination and replacing it with obedience to and dependence on the Messiah. What Jesus calls for here is a radical abandonment of one's own identity and self-determination. Commentator R.T. France put it this way, “Such ‘self-denial’ is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for Lent. ‘It is not the denial of something to the self, **but the denial of the self itself.**”¹

¹ France, R. T. (2002). [The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 340). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

When Jesus asked the disciples if they knew who he was, he wasn't asking simply for a confession. He was seeking their commitment. "Now that you know who I am, are you willing to commit your life to me?"

I read a paraphrase on this that goes like this, "*Now that you know who I am, are you ready to take up your cross and follow me? Before you answer, let me warn you that following me will seem in the eyes of the world as if you are wasting your life. The people of the world will never understand what you are doing. It will seem to them that by following me, you are throwing your life away. You always have another option. You can try to save your own life by following your own desires. Lots of people do that. They live as if their career was all that mattered. But the people who live only for this life in the end will find they wasted it on things that don't really matter. They try to save it by living for themselves, but in the end they will lose it. They have wasted their lives on trivial pursuits.*

But if you follow me—though the way will not be easy, and you will often be misunderstood—in the end you will save your life. And the people who laugh at you now will not laugh at you then. They will see you were right and they were wrong. After all, what good will it do if you become the richest man in the world or climb to the top of the corporate ladder or rise to the highest salary level in your company or win the applause of the world, what good will any of that do if in the end you find out it was all wasted? Will you be able to trade any of that in for another life?

No, you won't. But if you want to live that way, go ahead. Millions of people do. In the end they will be sorry, but by then it will be too late to do anything about it. So, what will it be? The way of the Cross or the way of the world? You've got to invest your life somewhere. What's the best deal you can make?

Folks, you and I are called to live for God and for other people. If you're willing to give your life to Jesus - as you follow Him as your leader, he will not let you down because He has already gone to the cross and grave . . . and because God raised him to life he has already won the victory over sin and death. When you choose Jesus, when you serve God, he will take care of your life.

The teaching of Jesus is radical and revolutionary. It is exactly the opposite of what we would expect, yet we see how it works out in practice. I could share with you story after story of people who've shared about how they had previously sought their own satisfaction yet ended up disillusioned and dissatisfied having wasted their lives . . . whereas those who chose to follow Jesus' teaching found life – life that was full, life that was satisfying, life that did have its' difficulties, but life that had purpose and offered an eternal reward.

This self-denial . . . it's for each and every one of us . . . yet too often we allow society's march of "self, self, self" delude us from seeing the necessity of the call of Christ to "deny and then truly live". We all have struggles, and those are only amplified by the pursuit of self over Christ. For some of us it's our bank account, for others their lack of self-control, for some it's sexuality, reputation, identity, anxiety, depression, mental health, family, illness. The pursuit of self falls woefully short in addressing any of these areas . . . and when it does (not if but when) . . . are you willing to look to Jesus and consider what he offers?

SLIDE 4 Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial. As we continue in verse 35 we see the second way to live an unashamed life. **Jesus instructs that we must lose our lives to be saved.**

I want to pause for a moment and ask, was Jesus a failure?

The life of Jesus is the best answer to that question. Consider the facts of His "career":

- He was born in an obscure village in an out-of-the-way province of the Roman Empire.
- He never went to college, nor did he have any professional training.
- He never had a bank account.
- He owned no property except the clothes on his back.
- He never held public office.
- He never wrote a book.
- He never had a wife or children.
- His closest friends were primarily blue-collar workers.
- He felt at home among the outcasts of society.

- His ministry consisted of preaching in the countryside, teaching in the synagogues, answering difficult questions, healing the sick, and casting out demons.
- His opponents openly accused him of consorting with the devil.
- Along the way, he made many powerful enemies by exposing corruption in high places.
- Finally, his adversaries captured him, tried him in a kangaroo court, and put him to death.

To be perfectly honest, by most modern standards we would consider him a failure. He never made it to the top. If ever a man seemed to waste his life, it was Jesus.

But consider this. After more than two thousand years . . .

- His words are remembered and repeated around the world.
- His followers now number in the billions and can be found in every country on earth.
- His personal integrity stands unsullied amidst centuries of attacks from cynics and sneers from the ignorant.
- His death, which seemed to be a tragedy, has become the means by which we can be reconciled to God.
- His whole mission on earth, which seemed to be a failure, has now become history's greatest success story.

How can this be? Jesus was humiliated to the point of death and seemed to lose his life for no purpose whatsoever. Yet through his death God exalted him to the very highest position in the universe,

SLIDE 5 *“So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:10-11).

SLIDE 6 Jesus made clear why he did what he did when he said, *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”* (John 12:24).

Out of one seed can come a harvest; but that seed must die in order to bear fruit. As long as the seed “saves” its life, it remains alone. But when it “loses” its life, then comes the fruit and the harvest.

If you try to “save” your life, in the end you “lose” it. But if you dare to “lose” it for Jesus’ sake, in the end you “save” it. Jesus is the supreme example of this principle. The attempt to preserve physical life will jeopardize the more essential *being or soul* of the disciple; whereas the willingness to lose even one’s physical life for the sake of the gospel will guarantee one’s eternal being. ***To lose one’s life is to lose physical existence, but to lose one’s soul has eternal consequences.***

SLIDE 7 Here’s a practical way to flesh this out. Let’s compare the difference between a career and a mission. A quick glance at a dictionary reveals the essence of the difference between the two:

- **A career is something you choose for yourself.**
- **A mission is something chosen for you by someone else.**

Interestingly, the Bible never talks about having a career. You won’t find the word in the Bible. Having a career is not a biblical issue. Having a mission *is*.

It is not that believers don’t have careers. We do. Some of us are lawyers, doctors, IT, bankers, nurses, teachers, janitors, entrepreneurs, writers, etc. But the difference is this: *The people of the world live for their careers; the followers of Jesus don’t.*

When your career is central in your life, then you are career-driven and career-minded while you climb the career ladder. You take a job and leave it two years later because it’s a “good career move.” You may break all the significant relationships in one place and move across the country because your career demands it. Everything is calculated to get you someday to that elusive place called “the top.” When you get there, your career will be complete, and the world will applaud your achievements. Yet, you can’t take your career with you when you die.

So, I am suggesting that being career-minded in this sense is precisely what Jesus meant when he said, “He who would save his life will lose it.”

SLIDE 8 Your career is the answer to the question, “What do you do for a living?”

Your mission is the answer to the question, “What are you living for?”

Your career is a ladder to climb. Your mission is a journey you take.

We only get one chance to live this life. Soon enough, sooner than we think, our moment will be over.

Do you have a career driven focus, or are you willing to accept your mission for God? The answer to that question makes all the difference in the world.

Here’s an example of the difference. In one of his sermons Ravi Zacharias tells the story of Robert Jaffray. Jaffray came from a wealthy Canadian family and in fact was heir to the Toronto Globe fortune. When he was a young man, he learned the Chinese language and was offered a large salary by Standard Oil of New York if he would forego his missionary career and work for them.

He refused, so they doubled their salary offer. He refused again. They sent him this message: “Robert Jaffray. At any cost.”

He messaged them back, “Your salary is big. Your job is too small.”

Jaffray turned his back on wealth and power to serve in China. He spent 35 years as a missionary in China and other parts of Southeast Asia and helped translate the Bible into Cantonese. When World War II broke out, he and other missionaries were placed in a Japanese prison camp. He died there two weeks before the end of the war.

Did he waste his life? It depends on your perspective. Jaffray died a martyr but his story serves as an example of how God can use one person – limitations and all – to bring thousands to Himself. Today one of the fastest growing, if not the fastest growing regions for Christianity is in China, the foundation of which was laid by missionaries like Robert Jaffray. Long after he passed, the spread of Christianity in Southeast Asia continues.

SLIDE 9 Jesus calls us to a life of self-denial. Jesus instructs that we must lose our lives to be saved. Finally, to live an unashamed life, **Jesus gives us an eternal perspective.**

SLIDE 10 In verse 36 Jesus says that it is possible to ‘gain the whole world, yet forfeit [our] soul’ (v.36). The actor Jim Carrey said, **‘I think everyone should get rich and famous and do everything they dreamed of so they can see that it is not the answer.’**

Your money will not fully satisfy your soul . . . and as you can’t take it with you when you die, you certainly can’t purchase your soul. Neither will your status, your fame, your education, or your connections. There is only one who fully satisfies your soul – it’s the same one who purchased your soul – his name is Jesus!

Jesus is calling you to a real relationship and you have to decide do you want to encounter him? As Pastor Barton continually reinforced through the 3-part unpacking of John 3:16 Jesus – Loves – YOU! And your soul will never find peace and rest until you surrender to the One who picked you and chose you and loves you. To prove how much he values you, he gave his very life for you!

See Jesus is not a shout out at an award show or a sporting event, he’s not a piece of jewelry you wear around your neck, he’s not just a part of your life . . . with Jesus he’s either all of your life or nothing at all.

As Christians we are convinced that Jesus is Lord of all. The first followers who spread this message – they didn’t just “die” figuratively . . . they literally gave their lives to follow Jesus and share his good news with the world. How could they do this? Because . . . they had encountered Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, and they had his eternal perspective.

Historically, Christianity has not been a movement that moves forward built on success after success but rather from sacrifice to sacrifice on the blood, sweat and tears of men and women who were convinced that Jesus's good news is so good that it's worth dying for. Extraordinarily, it is often the people who have gone through the greatest suffering who have the strongest faith. They testify to the presence of God with them, strengthening and comforting them in the midst of their pain. Betsie ten Boom, as she lay dying in the Ravensbruck concentration camp, turned to her sister Corrie and said, "We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still. They will listen to us, Corrie, because we have been here."

If Jesus *is* Lord – then he deserves far more than us being morally decent. I don't know what other paths you have tried in this life ... but have you tried Jesus? If you're willing to surrender control to him, if you're willing to accept the salvation and freedom only he can offer, if you can fix your eyes on the cross on which he died to ransom your life and mine and reconcile us to God ... you will encounter a peace that surpasses understanding – a peace that Betsie ten Boom knew even in the midst of one of the world's greatest horrors.

So it's time for a soul check - how are you doing? Are you ready to declare that Jesus is Lord? Are you ready to surrender your life? If you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth – you will be saved. You can't achieve Jesus ... you have to receive him. It's a free gift – and he loves you just the way you are. But he loves you too much to let you stay the way that you are. Thus, it's all or nothing with Jesus, and if you say yes, he'll begin a process of refining you and shaping you to be more like him.

To live an unashamed life, we are called to live a life of self-denial, to lose our lives to be saved, and to live with an eternal perspective. The words of Jesus in our text today conclude with a stern warning. Jesus is calling his contemporaries "a sinful and adulterous generation," where he repeats the language of the prophets, who accused Israel of infidelity, hardness of heart, and spiritual adultery (Isa 57:3–13; Ezek 16:32–41; Hos 2:2–6). Jesus' words also echo his earlier accusation that, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Mark 7:6) However his contemporaries assessed their spiritual well-being, Jesus had found them wanting. Their status remained one of alienation from God. Such a people cannot know the glory of God. If they are to know God, God must reduce himself to their level, yet when he does they scoff at the glory that appears in the only way in which it might be known—incognito in Jesus Christ. Their situation is desperate in yet another way, for unless Jesus is received "in this generation," the Son of Man – Jesus – warns that he will not receive them in his future glory. The future begins now.²

SLIDE 11 The biggest difficulty for the disciples must have been the problem of how to join all these different concepts in one and relate them to the Jesus before them. As commentator R.A. Cole noted, "**The humble Christ of history is always humanity's great stumbling-block, not only to his own generation but to ours also. God is revealed in Christ, but only to the eye of faith: to others, God is hidden in Christ, and they cannot see him. This is the great 'messianic secret'.** If you glance again at the context surrounding our Scripture today, it is no accident that the story of the transfiguration directly follows in Mark 9 – as something of the true glory of Christ is revealed to those who have already recognized Jesus as Christ in his lowliness."³

Friends, don't miss the Messiah – don't let yet another Christmas season come and go without taking Jesus's invitation seriously. Don't waste another second of your life. If you don't yet recognize who Jesus Christ truly is, I invite you to take steps towards him by investigating further. In January, we have another Christianity Explored class starting – it's the perfect place to come with your questions and doubts. You can let me know you're coming by signing up at Guest Services.

If it's time, if you're ready, there will be people up front ready to pray with you and help you start this journey with Jesus. Now you've heard the cost ... but the reward is beyond compare. Those who know Jesus ... don't not be ashamed ... share the great news you have already received, and help and invite those who've not yet encountered your Saviour!

Benediction: May God make you worthy of his calling and fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

² Edwards, J. R. (2002). [The Gospel according to Mark](#) (pp. 257–259). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

³ Cole, R. A. (1989). [Mark: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 210–213). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.