

***Discussion:***

- What is faith – an emotion, an action or both? Can you describe it?

**Introduction**

*'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it'*  
Mark 8:34-35

- In the last unit we looked at what it meant for Jesus to be king. We turn now to the key concern of the second half of the Gospel of Mark and to Jesus' prime concern in the last three weeks of his life – us! What does it mean for us to follow the king?
- Mark 8:34-10:52 gives example after example of what Jesus expects of those who want to follow him. He is heading to the cross, the true test of faith is about to be asked? The section starts with a declaration of what it means to be a disciple (8:34-35), then it gives several examples of what that looks like, before finishing with a reminder that what Jesus asks of his disciples is what he has asked of himself – that is to put his people before himself (10:45)

**What it means to be a disciple?**

- 8:34 describes the true disciple.
  - *Deny himself* – not my will but the will of God. He is the person who can put his wants and desires aside so that God's wishes can be met.
  - *Take up his cross* – in other words ready and able to lay down their life for another.
  - *Follow me* – through thick and thin, this person sticks by the King. This will not be a bed all of roses, to follow will mean suffering.
- Another way of considering this is to think about the difference between the short-term and the long-term. To be a disciple means that you live primarily with your eyes fixed on the long-term goal or the life to come, that is the life that has been guaranteed to the one who follows the king of eternity. This is in contrast to the one who fixes their eyes on the short-term, the here and now. This person forfeits their eternity for the temporary.

**Examples**

- The boy with the evil spirit. Jesus says *'everything is possible for he who believes'* (9:23) and so the boy's father asks *'help me to overcome my unbelief'*
- The disciples arguing about who will be the greatest! They are in the company of the one who is the greatest and their concern is for their own status! Jesus says *'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all'* (9:35) – he then uses little children as examples.
- The query about the man driving out demons. The disciples protective of their status seek to restrict a man driving out Spirits in Jesus' name, but Jesus rebukes the disciples instead. He says *'anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward in heaven'* (9:41).
- The obstacle that is sin (9:42-50). Jesus teaches that sin is serious and teaches that the disciple must take serious measures to ensure they are not held captive by sin. Don't get lost in the short-term if it means you forfeit the long-term.

- The warning against adultery. Jesus teaches against divorce because marriage is a gift from God (c.f. Gen 2:24). He says *'what God has joined together, let man not separate'*. Notice that the action in both examples cited are for the one who is enacting the divorce.
- The little children who come to Jesus. Jesus teaches *'anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it'* (10:15).
- The rich young man. Jesus says *'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!'* (10:23). This is not against wealth as such, but against placing wealth before serving Jesus.
- The disciples themselves who have *'left everything to follow'* (10:28) and Jesus teaches *'many who are first will be last and the last first'* (10:31).

### **Jesus – the ultimate example**

- The examples given are drawn to a close with Jesus for a third time teaching about his death – the true cost of being Lord (10:32-34).
- Jesus shows himself as the one who is the ultimate example because he will lay down his life for his disciples – the most dramatic demonstration of the first being last. He teaches *'whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'* (10:45).
- Either side of this declaration are two contrasting pictures.
  - First the disciples who have just been told *'the first will be last and the last first'* (10:31) and then given a final prediction of Jesus death (10:33) –and their response (particularly James and John) is to argue about who sit on the right and or the left. This proposal generates an indignant response from the other disciples. The cost of being a disciple is not about their glory.
  - The second picture is from blind Bartimaeus who without being able to see Jesus himself cries out to him for help, receives his sight and follows (10:46-52). Interestingly this is the last miracle recorded in Mark. At its completion, Jesus approaches Jerusalem where he heads for the cross – Bartimaeus follows.

### **Discussion:**

- Do you think the Bible is against or in favour of slavery? Explain.

### **The marks of a disciple**

Five marks:

#### **1) Faith**

Faith is:

- knowing
- being convinced of
- demonstrated

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- knowing
- being convinced of
- demonstrated

#### **2) Servant (9:33-37 c.f. 10:35-45)**

- Instead of being preoccupied with self, be preoccupied with service and love of others.
- Service is self-sacrificial – *'whoever wants to be first must be **slave** of all'* (10:44).
- Service may involve suffering.

- We can thank God the Jesus was not interested in power and position, but instead in went to the cross self-sacrificially.

**3) Not a stumbling block for others (9:38-42)**

- Being a disciple is not about restricting a fellowship or regulating followers as seen in the way the disciples were rebuked for trying to restrict the man who was casting out demons in the name of Christ.
- A disciple is one who fights on the side of Christ regardless of his group that he comes from or represents.
- It is more important to have a devotion to Jesus than it is to have a devotion to a worldly system, denomination or regulation.
- Don't make it difficult for people to be a disciple.
- Becoming a disciple is not about joining a team as much as it is about joining Christ in his work.

**4) Distinctive (9:43-50)**

- Being a disciple looks radically different and often will ask for radical measures to be taken.
  - Renouncing all that stands in the way – whatever sin activity that may be (9:43-48)
  - Renunciation of possessions (10:21), family (10:28-29), and life itself (10:34-35)
- The disciple should stand out distinctively like salt (9:50)
- The disciple should be a peace with other disciples (9:50)
- In other words the disciple should stand in sharp contrast to the world around.

**5) Not law keepers, but rather promise keepers.**

- As demonstrated in the case of the rich young man – an obedient man who kept '*all these [commandments] since [he] was a boy*' (10:20), but failed to take hold of the promise of eternity simply because he put his treasure before his willingness to follow Christ.
- Jesus' promise is that '*no one who has left home or brothers and sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (note: persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life*' (10:29-30)

**Reflection:**

- Why is it that our world often scoffs at the idea of being a disciple of Jesus?
- How in the day to day of life does their non-discipleship adversely affect them?

**For next Week:**

- Read Unit 9 (for next week).

**References** (for possible further reading)

- Marshall, I.H., 'Disciple' in the *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J.D.Douglas. Leicester: IVP, 1992, 285-86.
- Packer, J.I., 'Obedience' in the *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J.D.Douglas. Leicester: IVP, 1992, 852.
- Judge, E.A., 'Slave' in the *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J.D.Douglas. Leicester: IVP, 1992, 1121-25. (particularly the New Testament section).