

## Mark 8:31-38

<sup>31</sup>He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

<sup>33</sup>But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

<sup>34</sup>Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup>What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup>Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup>If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

A few years ago, the movie *The Passion of the Christ* was a regular part of many conversations during the Lenten season. People were asking, "Have you seen it? So what did you think of it?" Critics were saying it was too violent, too graphic. They insisted the whipping and the crucifixion scenes were too long and too bloody. To many people the movie was offensive. It was just too much!

*The Passion of the Christ* was absolute sticker shock for the majority of those who saw it. People were shocked at the brutality and the violence as it was portrayed in the film. At the heart of the controversy, however, was a question that people didn't want to face. "Jesus really went through all THAT for us?" The world was shocked that such a tremendous price was paid in order to save people from sin. The movie made it undeniably clear that sin is a big deal and that payment for sin required more than just a slap on the wrist.

The reaction was similar to the response we have to any other kind of sticker shock. We just don't agree with the price tag we see. Our reaction might be: "It can't possibly cost that much!" "There must be a mistake!" "I'll negotiate a better price." "There must be a way around paying that outrageous price."

What is true for cars, appliances, and furniture, we think should also be true for our relationship with God. We have our own idea of what the sticker price should be for our salvation. "After all, we can't be that bad when you compare us to the rest of the world." But the truth is in God's eyes we are just as bad as everyone else because *all* have fallen short of God's standard of perfection. In our text today Jesus reveals God's sticker price for salvation. And we experience "**The Sticker Shock of Lent.**"

In the verses before our text Jesus had asked his disciples what the crowds were saying about him. Then he proceeded to ask, "**But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?**" (Mark 8:29). Peter's response was dramatic, "**You are the Christ.**" This confession signaled a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Previously the emphasis, by words and by deeds, had been that Jesus truly is the Son of God. Now Jesus begins to emphasize his upcoming suffering, death, and triumphant resurrection.

Our text begins, "**He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**" The disciples were no longer shielded from the painful realities of the sacrifice Jesus was about to make. In order to pay for the sins of the world Jesus had to suffer. There was no option here, no alternative, no Plan B that could be put into effect. The price of salvation shocked the religious leaders of the Jews, but not because it was too high for Jesus. They thought the plan of salvation was too easy for people. These religious leaders always stressed what people had to do. The idea that we should receive full and free forgiveness via the death of Jesus seemed too cheap. They were certain that price should be higher. They were certain that people had to keep the law if they wanted to be right with God. But these people were wrong, very wrong. The solution of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law was, in fact, way too little. Their own feeble efforts to obey God's commands weren't nearly enough because God demands perfection.

There could be no shortcuts in God's plan to save us from our sins. As Paul reminds us, "**the wages of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23). Jesus would take all our sins upon himself and carry them to the cross. There Jesus would experience the rejection of his Heavenly Father as he suffered alone for us. This was a difficult message, but Jesus had more to say. Jesus would rise on the third day. Unfortunately the disciples didn't seem to hear that good news. All their ears heard was the price Jesus would pay.

This wasn't what the disciples wanted to hear. Peter, in particular, suffered severe sticker shock at hearing Jesus' words. Mark's Gospel just says that Peter took Jesus aside, but Matthew records what Peter said, "**Never,**

**Lord! . . . This shall never happen to you!”** (Matthew 16:22). Peter’s words, the thoughts of a sinful man, reveal that Christ’s cross was necessary. Peter didn’t realize such a price was necessary. His reaction sounds pious, but it betrayed his conviction that sin isn’t as bad as all that; it didn’t demand such a price.

Peter’s sticker shock is common today. Self-righteousness is the world’s way of thinking. “I’m not so bad – at least not compared to all the people in jail or the criminals on the streets.” “I’m doing my best and God can’t possibly ask for more than that.” “I’m a loving person so God just has to love me.” It’s no wonder so many people were shocked at the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. The world believes that we’re all really okay.

Stop and think for a moment. Every week here in church, with one set of words or another, we confess ourselves to be “poor, miserable sinners.” Yet we too often think a tidy, smiling, unbloody helper should be the only Savior we need. We think of the cute baby in the manger in Bethlehem. We marvel at the boy Jesus in the Temple who seemed wise beyond his years. We see the kind healer of diseases and the learned Teacher of God’s Word. I don’t like to think about the bloody man, nailed to a cross because of my sins.

Jesus’ answer to Peter’s outburst is a very strong rebuke. **“Get behind me, Satan! . . . You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”** Last week we heard how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Now one of Jesus’ own disciples had become an enemy of God’s plan of salvation. Peter unknowingly had become an instrument of Satan in tempting Jesus not to go through with the plan. The death of Jesus was not part of Peter’s plan. It’s not part of our plan either. That’s why we must listen to what the Lord says through the prophet Isaiah, **“[M]y thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways”** (55:8). Only God himself could have come up with this perfect plan of salvation.

Jesus could have just turned away from stubborn Peter, just as he could have turned away from our desire to work out our salvation on our own. But Jesus wanted Peter and he wants us to “buy in” to his plan. He wanted us to overcome our sticker shock. **“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and 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.”**

The shocking price for our forgiveness was huge – the life of the Son of God. But it was necessary. Only the blood of Jesus was sufficient price to pay for the sins of the whole world. And the price has been paid. We *have* forgiveness and eternal life, won by the Passion of the Christ. No price is now demanded of us.

Yet Jesus has one more important thing to say, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”** These words are not stating that he has set a price for us to pay; that there is still something we must do in regard to our salvation. Jesus has paid the price in full on our behalf. Rather, Jesus is speaking about what follows his saving work. He makes it possible for us to respond to his grace with the sanctified life of self-denial, cross bearing, and following him. The cost of being a disciple is not a payment, but a joyful attachment to Jesus. Our lives, our offerings, our sharing of the good news – these are all ways we say “thank you” for what God has done for us.

Denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus – Paul understood what that means when he wrote: **“And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again”** (2 Corinthians 5:15). We are enabled to live for him, since we no longer have to live for ourselves. **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires”** (Galatians 5:24). **“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:22–24).

You know what all that adds up to? Frankly, it is something rather shocking: The sticker shock of Jesus’ Passion leads to our passion to serve and follow Jesus.

What a miracle! God gives us the ability to deny ourselves, picking up our crosses, and following him. We do not have to live for ourselves anymore, but desire to live for him who died and rose for us. The Gospel makes us new. The shocking sticker price of Lent was paid in full in Jesus’ Passion. Lord, now help us to live and love and follow you. Amen.

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