

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed

of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

I recently watched a 3 part documentary called “Rich”. It was, as accurately named, about famous, rich people that we all know. The interviewer asked each guest if money made them happy or not. There was an old clip of Marilyn Monroe, along with many current famous people including singers, actors, and business people. It was very interesting. I ended up hearing the stories of probably 40 or so rich people, and not one single one of them said money made them happy. In fact, most of them said they were happier when they were struggling. Why? Because they were more in touch with their own spirits - they could feel their feelings, good and bad. They were surrounded

by people who loved them for who they were, unlike once they became famous. Celebrities, as a whole, are an unhappy lot. They made their dreams come true - sang their way to fame, acted until they finally got discovered, worked long, hard hours to attain what they have. And yet, none of those who were interviewed are actually happy.

These examples clearly show that wealth and success do not guarantee happiness. But, I want to stress that none of these wealthy, successful people are bad people. It is simply to say that they truly appear to be “focussing on human things instead of divine things” as Jesus says to Peter upon rebuking him for taking everything Jesus says too literally and not understanding all that He has been trying to teach him.

I wonder, at the end of their lives, if any of these wealthy people will wish that they had more meaning to their

lives? Did they have loving relationships or deep connections with at least a few people? Did they do good with their money? Did they help others?

Many “regular” folks believe that if they only had more money, they would be happier. If people would only recognize them for what they have done, they would be happier. But, it is also well documented that many lottery winners become unhappy as well. They often waste their money and end up broke, back to where they were or worse. As one of the people interviewed stated, “It may be because, quite simply, we don’t need other people to survive the way we did when we were poorer.”

Whatever the reasons, often times the wealthier people get, the less they value social connections -- and that eats into their overall sense of well-being.

The issue here is that while work does provide life satisfaction, working insanely long hours prevents us from doing things proven to make us happy, like spending more time with our families. Plus, “usually higher paying jobs and promotions come with more responsibility and stress.” The link between money and happiness is complicated: It is true that money can enhance certain aspects of happiness, such as financial security and comfort. But, it does not ensure overall happiness or well-being. Once essentials like food, shelter, and safety are attained, more money may have a reduced impact on overall happiness.

What has been studied over and over is that factors like relationships, health, purpose, and fulfillment have significant influences on happiness. Strong social connections, meaningful work, and a sense of community are pivotal to long-term happiness and well-being.

I personally can say that when both Karen and I changed jobs, our household income dropped by more than half. However, we are both happier, healthier and more connected to our true selves than we ever had been before. We have the time to actually devote ourselves to meaningful relationships with other people, serving and helping others, and spending quality time learning and growing as Christians.

Jesus, in today's gospel contrasts the temporary treasures of this world with the value of the soul, reminding us that nothing on earth compares to the worth of our relationship with God. Jesus warns against the danger of prioritizing earthly gain at the expense of our spiritual well-being, urging us to consider the eternal consequences of our decisions.

In a world that often values success, wealth, and comfort above all else, the message of Jesus in today's gospel serves as a powerful reminder of where our true priorities should lie.

As Christians, we are called to live for God, prioritizing spiritual growth and values of the Kingdom over the fleeting pleasures of this world. The cost of discipleship may be high, but the reward of knowing and serving Christ far outweighs any temporal gain.

The Bible tells us that some day each of us will stand before God. If we have denied Him and refused to follow Him, we will be judged for our unbelief. God will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" - this comes from Matthew 25:41. Whatever happens at judgment, we don't

really know. But, I want you to leave here remembering that Jesus said, “For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” Don’t get so focussed on how much of anything you have or don’t have in this world. God will provide for you what you need. Focus on divine things, not on things of this world.

Don’t be like the disciples in the clip Karen showed. They were so focussed on Earthly things such as how much money Matthew made as a tax collector that they harbored anger. Thomas kept demanding an apology, yet in other scenes, Phillip continuously reminded Matthew that none of them were who they were before they met Jesus. Their pasts were in the past, or at least should have been. They were so focussed on how difficult their lives as Jewish people has been that they couldn’t see through to the divine things that Jesus has been trying to teach them. As

they argued and made Matthew feel worse and worse, Jesus came back to camp bloodied and exhausted from a day full of healing people. The disciples stopped arguing immediately, humbled and shamed by the focus they had put on money and things of this world instead of on what Jesus had called them to do.

Even spending 24 hours a day with the Messiah Himself, many of the disciples didn't truly understand what they were doing or what impact it would make on the world. They just didn't have the capacity to understand. Not until many other things happened did they finally comprehend. And yet still, Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, denies knowing Jesus in the end.

But, in the end, the disciples did understand. They did take up their own crosses and followed Him. They followed Him with some gruesome consequences. Nine of the disciples were killed. Simon Peter who became the first Pope of the Catholic Church, Andrew and Simon the Zealot were all crucified, with Simon Peter requesting to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus. James was beheaded, Phillip was hung, Bartholomew was flayed with knives, James was stoned and clubbed to death, and Thaddaeus was killed with arrows. The others died of natural causes. And, although John the Baptist is not considered one of the twelve disciples, he was also beheaded. It is amazing that we know so little about the men who turned the world upside down. Jesus had prepared them and God used them in a powerful way to alert the world to His good news that Jesus Christ had come into the world to save sinners. These men gave their

lives and died so that all could hear the good news that the forgiveness of sins is free to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ and accepts Him as Lord and Savior.

Ultimately, they did focus on divine things and not things of this world, as much as was possible. They never gave up spreading the good news and the message of God.

They, unlike many rich and famous people of this world, never stopped believing, even if they messed up at times.

By the definition of disciple which is “a person who believes in the ideas and principles of someone famous and tries to live the way that person does or did”, we are all disciples of Jesus. So don't let things of this world cloud your judgment or skew your desires. Focus on divine things and never stop believing.

I want to end with a poem by Carol Wimmer with an extra verse that I added:

When I say, "I am a Christian"
I'm not shouting, "I've been saved!"
I'm whispering, "I get lost sometimes
That's why I chose this way"

When I say, "I am a Christian"
I don't speak with human pride
I'm confessing that I stumble –
needing God to be my guide

When I say, "I am a Christian"
I'm not trying to be strong
I'm professing that I'm weak
and pray for strength to carry on

When I say, "I am a Christian"
I'm not bragging of success
I'm admitting that I've failed
and cannot ever pay the debt

When I say, "I am a Christian"
I don't think I know it all
I submit to my confusion
asking humbly to be taught

When I say, “I am a Christian”
I’m not claiming to be perfect
My flaws are far too visible
but God believes I’m worth it

When I say, “I am a Christian”
I still feel the sting of pain
I have my share of heartache
which is why I seek God’s name

When I say, “I am a Christian”
I do not wish to judge
I have no authority
I only know I’m loved

When I say, “I am a Christian”
I use gifts I was given
To better this world.
And to build the Kingdom

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, It is you and your constant, patient love for us that we should be focussing on. Not worrying about money or status; not worrying about whether or not we are “good enough”. You made us in your image, with love and grace. We are good enough, rich enough and famous enough to do your work. Please bring peace to all those who suffer and have let money and fame change them. Bring someone into their lives who can introduce or re-introduce You to them before it is too late. Soften the hearts of the cruel, silence the tongues of the wicked, open the minds of the unbelievers. Give us each a specific mission to accomplish in order to grow your Kingdom. And give us the courage we need to carry out that mission. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

