



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Mark 8:31-9:1

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English Standard Version

“Denial and the Soul”

The 22nd Sermon in a series on The Gospel of Mark entitled
“The King and His Cross”

Hey. Welcome to our worship service today. Apparently, it’s Casual Sunday, I mean, look at you guys! I’m glad you’re comfortable. Today, we’re meeting all over Loudoun County as a church distributed. I hope the service has been meaningful for you so far. This type of service gives us a small taste of how much of the church has worshipped, from house to house, for much of church history. Before I start, please turn in your Bibles, and have someone read Mark 8, verse 31 through Mark 9, verse 1. Put me on pause while you do that.

Mark 8:31-9:1

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” ³⁴ And 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. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is

ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”¹ And He said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Hey ... Welcome Back!

Let's pray together as we delve into the riches of God's Word this morning.

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we need it. Thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand. It's hard to admit that life doesn't seem very comfortable right now, things don't seem to be very safe, and it looks like much of our world is out of control; and still, it's even harder to admit that we need You. So help us to consider what it really means to follow Christ and to hear Your Word. Thank You that today we're learning once again from John Mark, a follower of Jesus, as he brings us the Good News of the life of Christ. Help us to hear it, understand it, believe it, and obey it. And so we pray, speak through the Gospel of Mark this morning, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, help us see Jesus, for in His name we pray, amen and amen.

INTRODUCTION: “The Turning Point”

This past Christmas I was given the movie *Darkest Hour*, starring Gary Oldman in an Oscar winning performance as Winston Churchill. It's a fascinating movie about turning down negotiations with Adolf Hitler and leading Great Britain into World War II. You see, when Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain in May of 1940, the world was eight months into the Second World War. It wasn't going well for the Allies and it was about to get a whole lot worse. When Churchill stood up in the House of Commons to make his first speech as Prime Minister, he didn't mince words.

Perhaps he could have said that everything was under control and the war was going to be won without much difficulty. Perhaps, to make people feel better, he could have suggested that Hitler was about to give up. Churchill, of course, was not like that. His words on that day are still remembered, **“I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.”** That doesn't sound too encouraging. Did he say the war would be over by Christmas? Hardly. What he said was, **“We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering.”** One of the reasons Churchill was **respected and admired so much** was simply that he told it like it was. He never claimed that the war was going to be easy. No, the road to victory would be **long** and **painful**. To pretend otherwise would have been utterly futile.

When the Bible describes the Christian life, it pulls no punches. The Bible says it's going to be tough – more like war than peace. Living as a Christian is going to involve toil, tears, sweat, and maybe blood as well. It's a struggle; it'll involve suffering. If you're a Christian – or if you're not a Christian but are wondering what it's like to **be** a Christian – then you need to understand what you're in for. The fact is that all sorts of people have misunderstood or misrepresented the Christian life. For some, being a Christian is like a crutch that you need only if you're weak – if you're too feeble to face life alone, you can believe all this stuff about God

and heaven and going to church. For others, to be a Christian is just about having better morals – it’s a way of life, based on the Golden Rule and whatever else Jesus taught. You try your best; live a respectable life; and in the end, if it all works out, you’ll be rewarded.

Can that be right? Jesus gives us the plain, unvarnished truth. Here in **Mark 8:31–9:1**, we get the real story. Although the disciples are finally thinking along the right lines as far as Jesus’ identity is concerned, they still have no idea what being the ‘*Messiah*’ really means. So the last thing Jesus wants is for them to rush off and start some sort of misleading campaign — like saying the war will be over by Christmas! This passage sets out the plan for the rest of Mark’s Gospel, as Jesus answers two key questions about Himself.

First, **What does it mean that He is the Christ?**

And second, **What does it mean to follow this Christ?**

We’ve been looking at the Gospel of Mark every week for six months now and learning what this gospel tells us about the life of Jesus. In the very first part of the book, **chapters 1–8**, everything revolves around this question ... *Who is Jesus? Who is this?* Here at the very middle of the book of Mark, the end of the first half, chapter 8, Peter begins to get it. He says, **“You are the Christ.”**

And last week, in his last sermon at Potomac Hills, Dave Dorst laid that out wonderfully for us. As a reminder, when he says *the Christ*, he’s using a word that literally means “*the Anointed One*.” It’s the Messiah. He’s not just saying, “You’re a king.” The Anointed One means **the King to end all kings**. The true King. The King who’s going to **put everything right**. “*You’re the Christ. You’re the Messiah. You’re the King.*” And Jesus says, “*You’re right.*” But then He immediately turns around in **verse 31** and begins to say things that are **stunning** and **shocking**. He says, “Yes, I’m a king. I’m *the* King. But I’m not what you’re expecting.” **This is the pivotal passage of the whole book** ... this is crucial ... because it tells us **two basic things**. First of all, Jesus says, “*I’m a king, but a king on a cross.*” That’s what He’s saying in **verse 31**. The second basic thing he’s saying is found in **verse 34**, and that’s, “*If you want to follow Me, you have to go to the cross too.*” This entire sermon series on the Gospel of Mark is entitled “**The King and His Cross.**” And it’s based on today’s passage.

But right in the middle of these two incredibly important points an issue arises, and it’s not an insignificant issue. So let’s dive in and we’ll start with ...

v. 31: THE CROSS JESUS TAKES ¹

¹ **The Introduction and Exposition of the text is adapted from the sermons, “The King on a Cross”** by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 6/25/06, *The Tim Keller Sermon Archive*, Logos Bible Software 8.11; “*The Golden Stitches of Sovereignty: What Holds Our Gospel Together*” by Dr. John Piper, Pastor Emeritus, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, preached at The Gospel Coalition 2019 National Conference in Indianapolis, IN, 4/1/19, www.desiringGod.org; “*Cross Purposes*” by Dr. Derek Thomas, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church (ARP), Columbia, SC, preached at First Presbyterian Church (PCA), Jackson, MS, 1/16/05, www.fpcjackson.org; and “*The Ultimate Challenge*” by Rev. Matt Woodley, Editor, PreachingToday.com and Pastor of Compassion Ministries, Church of the Resurrection, Wheaton, IL, nd, www.preachingtoday.com. **And the books, A Ransom for Many: The Gospel of Mark Simply Explained**, by Dr. Steven Wilmschurst, pages 178–186; *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (previously published as *The King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*), by Dr. Tim Keller, pages 103–118; and *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel according to Mark* by Dr. James Edwards, pages 252–261.

“And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Jesus’s first important point here is *“the Son of Man must suffer.”* When we hear Jesus referring to himself as the *Son of Man*, we assume He’s saying He’s human – but this title means a lot more than that. In the book of Daniel there’s a reference to *“one like a son of man,”* a divine messianic figure who comes with the angels to put everything right. **Daniel 7:13–14**, *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”*

But now Jesus says the Son of Man *“must suffer ...”* Before this moment ... **never** ... had anyone in Israel connected **suffering with the Messiah**. Of course, there are many prophecies in the Old Testament about a mysterious Servant who suffers (**Isaiah 43** is the most well-known), but nobody before Jesus had ever associated those texts with the hope of the Messiah. The notion that the Messiah would suffer **made no sense at all**, because the Messiah was supposed to defeat evil and injustice and put everything right. How could he defeat evil by suffering and dying? That seemed impossible, even ridiculous.

Jesus didn’t just say that the Son of Man **would** suffer; He said that the Son of Man **must** suffer. This word is **so crucial** that it’s implied throughout **verse 31**, *“the Son of Man must suffer many things and ‘must’ be rejected ... and ‘must’ be killed, and ... ‘must’ rise again.”* The word **must** modifies and controls **the whole sentence**, and that means that everything in this list **is a necessity**. Jesus **must** suffer, **must** be rejected, **must** be killed, **must** be resurrected. This is one of the most significant words in **the story of the world**, and it’s scary. What Jesus said was not just “I’ve come to die” but *“I have to die. It’s absolutely necessary that I die. The world can’t be renewed, and neither can your life, unless I die.”*

Why would it be **absolutely necessary** for Jesus to die? You see, when someone wrongs you, a **debt** is established that has to be paid by someone. When someone robs you of a thing, or money, an opportunity, robs you of happiness, of reputation, or takes away something else that you’ll never get back, that creates a sense of **debt**. Justice has been violated – this person owes you. Once you sense that **debt**, again there are only two things you can do.

One thing you can do is to try to make that person pay. You can try to destroy **their** opportunities or ruin **their** reputation; you can hope **they** suffer, or you can actually make **them** suffer. But there’s a big problem with that. As you’re making **them** pay the **debt**, as you’re making **them** suffer because of what they did to you, **you’re becoming like them**. You’re becoming harder, colder; you’re becoming like the perpetrator. Evil wins. What else can you do?

The alternative is to forgive. But there’s nothing easy about forgiveness. When you have vengeful thoughts, when you want to take vengeful actions ... but you refuse them in an effort to forgive ... **it hurts**. When you refrain from revenge, and forgive instead, it’s painful. Why? Instead of making the other person **suffer**, you’re **absorbing** the cost yourself. You aren’t trying to get your reputation back by tearing their reputation down. You’re forgiving them and it’s costing you. That’s what forgiveness is. True forgiveness always involves **suffering**.

So the **debt** of wrong doesn't vanish: **Either they pay, or you pay.** But here's the irony. **Only if you pay** that price of forgiveness, **only if you absorb** the **debt**, is there any chance of righting the wrong. If you confront somebody with what they've done while you've got vengeance in your heart, they won't listen to you. They'll sense that you're not seeking **justice** but **revenge**, and they'll **reject** what you say. You'll just perpetuate the cycle of retaliation. Only if you have refrained from vengeance and paid the cost of forgiveness will you have any hope of getting them to listen, of seeing their own error. And even if they don't listen, your forgiveness breaks the cycle of retaliation.

If we know that forgiveness **always involves suffering** for the forgiver and that the only hope of righting wrongs comes by paying the cost of suffering, ... then it shouldn't surprise us when God says, "The only way I can forgive the sins of the human race is to **suffer** – either you'll have to pay the penalty for sin or I will." Sin **always** entails a penalty. Guilt can't be dealt with unless someone pays. The only way God can pardon us, and not judge us, is to go to the cross and absorb it Himself. And so Jesus says, "**I must suffer.**"

When Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins, He won through losing. He achieved our forgiveness on the cross by turning the values of the world on their head. He didn't "fight fire with fire." He didn't come and raise an army in order to put down the latest regime. He didn't take power; He gave it up – and yet **He triumphed**. On the cross, the world's abuse of power was exposed for what it is and was defeated. The spell of the world's systems was broken.

The corrupt powers of this world have many tools to make people afraid, the worst one being death. When you know some power can kill you, you're scared, and they can use your fear to control you. But since Jesus died and rose again from the dead, if you can find a way to hold fast to Christ, you know that **death, the worst thing** that can possibly happen to you, is now the best thing. Death will put you in God's arms and make you the best you ... you could possibly be. And when death loses its sting, when death no longer has power over you because of what Jesus did on the cross, then you no longer have to live in fear. And that's the cross Jesus takes. But we don't always react in that understanding, forgiving, willing to suffer kind of way, do we? No we don't. And neither did Peter. So let's look at ...

v. 32-33: THE CROSS WE REJECT

³² *And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.* ³³ *But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

By using the word **must**, Jesus is indicating that He's planning to die – and that He's doing it voluntarily. He's not merely **predicting** it'll happen. Although this is the first of three times He will say this. Jesus is going to repeat this news of His death and resurrection again in chapter 9 and then again in chapter 10. Like us, the disciples can sometimes be slow learners. But He's not just saying this will happen. He's saying this **must** happen. I **want** it to happen. I **intend** it to happen. This is what probably offends Peter the most. It's one thing for Jesus to say, "I'll fight and be killed," and yet another thing entirely to say, "This is why I came; **I intend to die!**" That's totally incomprehensible to Peter.

That's why the minute Jesus says this, Peter begins to "**rebuke**" Him. This is the word used elsewhere for what Jesus does to demons. This means Peter is condemning Jesus in the **strongest possible language**. Why is Peter so undone, that he would turn on Jesus like this ...

right after identifying Him as the Christ? From childhood, Peter's been told that when the Messiah came, He would defeat evil and injustice by ascending the throne. But now Jesus is saying, "Yes, I'm the Messiah, the King, but I came not to live **but to die**. I'm not here to take power but to **lose** it; I'm here not to rule but to **serve**. And **that's** how I'm going to defeat evil and put everything right."

Notice that the text doesn't say, "Peter was frightened and urged Jesus to hide." It doesn't say, "Peter was compassionate over Jesus's future suffering." The text says just the opposite. Peter wasn't compassionate; he was **opposed**. He **opposed** what Jesus said. He **rebuked** him. He accused Jesus of saying something wrong. Something worthy of **rebuke**. And He only said one thing. It **must** happen. And Peter responds, "Jesus, with all due respect, Your suffering and rejection and getting killed doesn't **have to** happen. You shouldn't talk like that. I **rebuke** You." To which Jesus responds with His own "**rebuke**" (using the same word). And He does it to protect all the disciples, not just Peter, **verse 33**, "*But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*" "Peter, you are not seeing the **necessity** of My suffering the way God does. You don't like the language of **necessity** when it comes to suffering and killing. You don't like Me saying, 'My death **must** take place.' You would counsel Me – **even rebuke Me** – that this is not the way God thinks or acts. Well, Peter, old friend, you're wrong, and **I rebuke you for this.**"

"Satan doesn't like this either. And without even realizing it, you've become his mouthpiece. When I say that something **must** take place, Satan hears the implication: he's **not** in charge; **God is**. And he knows his days are numbered — **necessarily!** And, Peter, the whole human race is like him. That's why I said, 'You're talking like Satan and you're talking like a mere man.' Fallen human beings don't like it when I use the word '**must**' like this. The Son of Man **must** suffer, **must** be rejected, **must** be killed, **must** be raised."

Can you see why Peter didn't like that? It's not because he misunderstood Jesus, but rather, it's because **He did understand** Jesus. Jesus looked at His disciples, and at Peter, and at me, and at you ... for **you**, because of **you**, because of **your** sin ... I **must** suffer, **must** be rejected, **must** be killed, **must** be raised. Jesus looked at you ... and said, "**one of us must die** to pay the penalty for your sin. **I'm going to make sure that it's Me.**" You can't understand the gospel unless you understand the great depths of your own sin, the amazing grace of The King on His Cross on your behalf, and the absolute need for you to confess your sin and profess your faith in such a great salvation. Peter struggled with it and so do we. And you know something, it doesn't get any easier. Because once you get past the cross we reject, you have to face ...

v. 34-9:1: THE CROSS JESUS DEMANDS

³⁴ And 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. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." ¹ And He said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Jesus is saying, “Since I am a King on a cross, if you want to follow Me *you* must go to a cross too.” What does it mean to take up our cross? What does it mean to lose our life for the gospel in order to save it? You must lose yourself, **verse 35**, “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.*” What does that deliberately paradoxical statement mean? Jesus is saying, “It’s not enough just to know Me as a teacher or as some abstract moral principle; you have to look at My life. I went to the cross – and on the cross I lost my identity so you can have one.” Once you see the Son of God loving you like that, once you’re moved by that, you begin to get a strength, an assurance, a sense of your own value that’s not based on what you do or whether somebody loves you, whether you’ve lost weight or how much money you’ve got. You’re free – your identity is now found in Christ, not in yourself or in what you do.

When Jesus says in **Mark 9:1**, “*Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.*” ... what does He mean? Some people have interpreted this to mean that the current generation wouldn’t pass away before He returned to earth. I don’t think that’s what he’s saying. The early church cherished this passage well beyond the death of Jesus’s generation. They knew that Jesus meant something else. They understood Him to mean that although the kingdom of God began in weakness – on the cross – it wouldn’t end that way. They would see the power of His resurrection, and see the church multiply and grow in love, and service, and influence in the world.

For us, the kingdom of God begins with weakness, relinquishment, giving up the rights to our own life; it begins with admitting that we need a Savior. We need someone to fulfill all the requirements and pay for our sin. That’s weakness. Jesus started in weakness – first, by becoming human, and second, by going to the cross. And if we want Him in our life, we have to start in weakness too. The kingdom begins there, but it won’t end there. Someday, when Jesus returns and ushers in a renewed creation, love will triumph over hate, and life will triumph over death. You see, if there really is a King who loves us, and if there really is a stain of sin that we can’t wash out on our own, then there’s going to have to be a cross. And I think the main point of this passage is not that you go **get your own cross** to take up, but that Jesus already has your cross. He hung on it. Your cross for your sins. When you take up your cross, you’re taking up His cross ... The King’s Cross ... cause you’re a follower of the King.

CONCLUSION: *The Answers to Two Important Questions*

Near the beginning of this sermon, I said that Jesus makes two very important points. First, **What does it mean that He is the Christ?** And we found that answer in **verse 31**, “*the Son of Man **must** suffer many things and ‘**must**’ be rejected ... and ‘**must**’ be killed, and ... ‘**must**’ rise again.*” Jesus looked at you ... and said, “**one of us *must* die** to pay the penalty for your sin. I’m going to make sure that it’s Me.”

And the second important point was, **What does it mean to follow this Christ?** And we found that answer in **verse 34**, “*If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*” And that’s a hard answer. “**Let him deny himself**” – that means you have to give up **The Myth of Comfort**. Whether you call it the old man, the sinful nature, or the flesh, it’s that part of us which rebels against God’s glory, running away from God, even viewing God as an enemy. One of our most basic desires of the flesh is the craving for comfort and for a comfortable life. We can act like the most decent, respectable, righteous, church-going people

until someone messes with our comfort – and then watch out! Most parents could tell you about something called the “terrible twos” when everything revolves around us and our need for comfort. Well, parents can also tell you about the “terrible twelves” and the “terrible twenty-twos.” My family and friends could probably tell you about the “terrible-32’s” and the “terrible 42’s” and in two months I’m gonna turn 62 so watch out.

Unfortunately, as we grow older our craving for comfort and a comfortable life grows deeper and stronger. All of us have a “terrible twos” inside of us. Jesus says, “Deny yourself. Deny that terrible twos inside.” The Apostle Paul emphasizes the point in **Ephesians 4:22-24** when he writes, “*put off your **old self**, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and to put on the **new self**, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*”

It gets harder, because Jesus goes on, “*Let him deny himself **and take up his cross***” – which means you have to give up **The Myth of Safety**. Jesus isn’t talking about putting up with your weird uncle, a manipulative parent, or that lady at church who said that mean thing. Jesus is challenging **the myth of safety**, the lie that life should be completely safe and risk-free; the seduction that we must arrange our life to avoid danger. We’re basically safety fanatics. So we spend an enormous amount of energy killing germs, buckling up, wearing helmets, guarding our kids from bullies and abuse. Please don’t misunderstand me: safety is a good thing. Wash your hands and buckle your seat belt. But listen carefully ... if you want to follow Jesus, you might get hurt. Yes, wear your helmet and buckle your seatbelt and protect your children – of course! Then be as winsome and kind and gentle as possible. Love people. Stand up for justice and seek out the lost, lonely, and broken. But don’t think that by being safe enough and nice enough you’ll escape the cross. No, be prepared, at all times and in all places to take up your cross because it’s always there. **The shadow of The King’s Cross falls across you all the time**. **Taking up your cross** explodes the myth of a safe life.

But He’s not done yet, because Jesus finishes the verse by saying, “*Let him deny himself and take up his cross **and follow Me***” – which means you have to give up **The Myth of Control**. Peter’s problem was that Jesus wasn’t going according to plan. Well, I’ve got bad news for you. Jesus only follows one plan – and it ain’t yours. **John 4:34**, “*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”* Jesus follows the will of His Father. And as He follows God, He tells us, **Follow Me**.

The essence of Christianity isn’t following a list of rules or being born into the right family. It all boils down to those first words given by Jesus to His first followers. We talk a lot about believing in Jesus, and that’s good Biblical language. The problem is that it can slip into an intellectual exercise. Jesus’ language is more direct: **Follow Me**. Line your life up behind Me. If you **Follow Me** you have, of course, believed in Me. The Christian life isn’t just faith; it’s faith in action ... it’s doing what Jesus says. So when Jesus says things like “Love your enemies” or “Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth” or “Do not worry about your life” or “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength” they aren’t just pious platitudes; they’re a way of life. Jesus challenges the myth **that we’re in control**.

So, how have you done this week of **a worldwide coronavirus pandemic**?

How’s **The Myth of Comfort** working out for you? You got enough toilet paper? Enough food, water, and wine? Has that inner “terrible twos” come out waiting in those long lines at Costco? If you value comfort, this has been a tough week. How’s **The Myth of Safety**

working out for you? Stocked up on hand sanitizer? Disinfectant wipes? Who's the germ-killing safety fanatic in your house? Oh, it's you! So, what's it going to look like to love other people this week? Have you called anyone in our church, any of your neighbors, those who are elderly, or who have underlying medical conditions – and asked, “How can I help? What do you need? Let me get it for you.” How's **The Myth of Control** working out for you? Everybody doing what **you want**? Maybe you have to work from home now. With all the kids home from school ... bothering you. No problem, at least it's Sunday so today you can just drop them off in the nursery – oh, wait. No nursery today. No Children's Church either. And next week isn't looking any better. If you're a control freak, and we have our fair share, let me tell you ... not you, but those other people ... well, this has been a hard week.

The Gospel of Mark is letting you know that if you live by **comfort**, or **safety**, or **control** ... then **every week** is going to be a hard week. Welcome to the Christian Life! Because Christians **give all that stuff up** when they obey Jesus' command to “*Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*”

And you know who finally got that? ... **Peter**. The same Peter who said, “**You are the Christ.**” And then **rebuked** Christ. And then **denied** Christ ... three times ... would go on to write, **1 Peter 1:18-19**, “... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with **the precious blood of Christ**, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” And then in **1 Peter 3:18**, he wrote, carrying the weight of a lifelong burden of rebuking and denying the Son of Man, “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, **the righteous for the unrighteous**, that He might bring us to God ...*” Peter finally got it. I hope you do too. Because it's such Good News.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have spoken to us by Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Thank You that You have given us a King, Your Son, our Savior. Thank You for giving us a picture of what it means to follow Jesus. Help each of us to acknowledge that we need the gospel today just as much as the first day we believed it. This will be just as true tomorrow, and the next day, and the next.

Keep us convinced, Lord Jesus, because we're way too much like Peter. In our own ways, like Peter, we try also try to “keep You from the cross.” When we mute our hearts to the shock of grace — minimizing our need of the gospel, we deny Your cross. When we think, even for one moment, that our obedience merits anything, or makes You love us more than You already do, we deny Your cross. When we wallow in comfort, or safety, or control – dismissing Your great love lavished upon us in the gospel, I deny Your cross. Remind us again, that The shadow of The King's Cross falls across us all the time.

Father, forgive us for our lack of faith, forgive us for being afraid to admit our sins, forgive us for how we're proud of our comfort, and our safety, and our control, and work in each of us this year as we live with Mark, a follower of Jesus, as we hear what he hears, given to him by eyewitnesses of Christ. Thank You for this story of amazing grace. Thank You for the glimpses we get of Jesus in His grace towards sinners like us. Give us, we pray, the faith to believe that we can do and be whatever Jesus asks us to do and be. Teach us to respond with a greater trust in You, and in Your Word, and in this Gospel, to draw us ever closer to Your Son,

our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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1 Peter 2:21, 24-25

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. ... He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”