

# Jesus' New World Order

Message 9

## *The Cost of Jesus' Kingdom*

Mark 6:53-8:38

### ***Following Jesus is Not Free***

Did you think that following Jesus was free? Boy were you wrong! A lot of people are misinformed this way. They think that it costs nothing to follow Jesus, but this is not what the Bible teaches. Perhaps you heard someone declare that anyone can come to Jesus. That is true – anyone can come to Jesus – and we have seen this in our study of Mark's gospel. Think of all the strange people who came to Jesus: lepers, paralytics, demon possessed, rich, poor, educated, ignorant, feverish – even the dead! And look at yourselves here tonight. We are a pretty motley crew ourselves. So yes, anyone can come to Jesus. It is the following that is costly – more costly than you can imagine. But the payoff – now there is the thing. The payoff is out of this world! Tonight we are going to continue following the apostles as they follow Jesus, and in the end we will discover the incredible reward for paying the steep price of following.

We pick up the story with the apostles tumbling out of their boat in an advanced stage of exhaustion. They tramped all over Galilee preaching for two weeks. Then they had to endure an all-day sermon by Jesus in front of over 10,000 people. Then Jesus gave them the awful job of feeding all those people. Servants' work! It was a disgusting experience. Then the last straw. You know Jesus was just tormenting them. He was probably angry with the apostles for their sarcasm about finding bread for over 10,000 people. If He is so wonderful, why didn't He know the wind would be too strong for them to row across the Sea of Galilee that night? All night! They rowed all night. And He had no intention of helping them! By now the apostles are very angry with Jesus for all they have endured at His hand. Angry and tired, they are long past their admiration for His great works of healing, His brilliant teaching, and His powerful signs. Their hearts are hard.

### ***Tradition!***

So they land at Gennesaret, and Jesus goes at it again. Throngs of people pour out of the towns and villages, and Jesus heals them all. Imagine the joy of these poor people who have suffered for weeks, or years, with sickness! There must have been dancing in the streets, and laughter, and a festival atmosphere. But in the midst of this happy crowd were some who were not pleased. They were not celebrating the release from suffering. They were watching – to see if Jesus or His disciples broke any laws. Sure enough, their diligence was rewarded. It turns out that some of Jesus' disciples were eating without washing their hands. Now I know this will shock you as well. Undoubtedly your own mother warned you always to wash your hands before eating. You yourself would never think of eating without washing first. But in first century Galilee washing your hands was even more important. It was a violation of serious tradition to neglect this vital duty. So, good upstanding citizens that they are, these noble Pharisees helpfully point out this violation to Jesus.

At this point in Jesus' ministry the Pharisees did not have a positive attitude toward Jesus, and Jesus' reply in this matter could hardly have improved things. Instead of admitting His guilt, or apologizing for his oversight, or explaining His way of seeing things, Jesus went on the attack and accused these Pharisees of being hypocrites. He quoted Isaiah's condemnation of people who honor God with their talk, but not with their lives. Then He accused them of abandoning God's commands in favor of commands of men. Harsh words!

Not content with generalities, Jesus gives a specific example of how the Pharisees use their traditions to nullify God's word. The fifth of the Ten Commandments is this: "Honor your father and your

mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12) Now when we hear this command to honor our parents, we take it to mean that we should treat them with respect. In the New Testament, Paul tells little children to obey their parents – so clearly obedience is part of honoring for young children. But there comes a time when children grow up and leave home. At least when you are married, you are no longer obligated to obey all your parents might say. But the fifth commandment never goes away. All your life you must honor your parents. When honor no longer means obedience, it still means respect.

But here our understanding needs to be improved by the scripture. In the Bible honor also has a financial component. A simple example is Timothy 5:17-18.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.<sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

You can see that Paul is speaking about money here. Paul recognizes that some elders in the church are specially devoted to preaching and teaching. These elders ought to receive double honor, which he explains by saying, “The laborer deserves his wages.” So the concept of honor includes financial support as well as respect. The connection is not hard to see. It is rather shabby to say you respect your pastor, yet refuse to pay him a decent salary.

Now coming back to parents, we can see that an essential part of honoring your parents is to support them when they are too old to support themselves. Parents support children until they can earn a living, and then children support their parents when they can no longer earn a living. Are you happy to hear this? What do you think of supporting your parents when they get old? Suppose they live a long time. Are you willing to pay for food and shelter for them when they are unable to work? That might be a significant drain on your finances. It would certainly limit your options. Think, if you did not have to provide a roof for your parents, you could buy a beach house! But who is going to tell his parents, “Sorry Mom and Dad, I cannot give you a place to stay. I am planning to buy a beach house instead.” It would take a pretty heartless person to watch his parents go homeless so he could enjoy a vacation home.

What is needed is some way to relieve you of the burden of caring for your parents without putting you in the awkward position of turning them out on the streets. You would have to find some way of employing your money which is even more virtuous than supporting your parents. Yes! The Pharisees found just the solution to this problem. They devised a legal technique called Corban. Here is how it worked. You would give your excess money to God. No one would dare challenge you on this. Giving to God is supremely virtuous. No one is more holy than God, and no one is more worthy of honor than God. Even your parents – God bless their souls – are not as honorable as God. No one could say that you should take money you could give to God and give it to your parents. Furthermore, if anyone thought he should support his parents in their old age, he would appear less spiritual than those who gave their money to God. So the drift of the whole culture would be to enter into this arrangement. But – and here is the important part – now that you have agreed to give your excess money to God, it will still be available for you to use, if you need it. This was the genius of Corban. You got the credit for giving away your money, and the pleasure of spending it on yourself. Corban was nothing other than a brazen, wicked scheme for dispossessing parents of the support they naturally expected from their children.

So now you can see why Jesus was so hot about this. Parents were being cheated, mistreated, and dishonored by greedy children on the pretense of worshiping God. It was an evil practice on three counts. First, it meant that parents were suffering. Second, it made God a partner to the crime. And third, it gutted the scripture of its meaning. It is this last point that Jesus focused on. He said that the practice of Corban

made the scripture void, or empty. The NIV translates this word “nullify,” and the NKJ has “of no effect.” These wicked Pharisees made the scripture useless by this practice.

How does this apply to us today? For one thing, you should honor your parents. Respect them now, and plan to care for them in their old age. But that is not really the main point of this passage. Often I hear people use passages like this to teach that Jesus was opposed to tradition. They declare therefore that authentic followers of Jesus reject tradition. Such people seek to live only by the New Testament, and claim to practice a purer form of Christianity. On the surface it sure appears that Jesus rejects tradition, but the matter is not so simple. All you have to do is go over to Paul again to find him strenuously urging believers to keep the traditions. How do we reconcile Paul’s positive attitude toward tradition with Jesus’ negative view? The key is in noting carefully what it is that Jesus was opposing. Jesus did not oppose tradition for its own sake. He opposed tradition that nullifies God’s word. This was the problem. Washing hands was not an issue. Giving to the temple was not a problem. There are any number of traditions that Jesus did not oppose. Think, he joyfully participated in a wedding. Now that’s a tradition! But the wedding at Cana was not conducted in a manner that mistreated people or nullified God’s word.

Every group has traditions. RUF at Lehigh has traditions. Traditions are an inevitable part – and a good part – of human society. They are the cultural glue that holds us together. The application here is not to allow traditions to get in the way of obedience to God’s word. So have Christmas parties and weddings, but never plan them for Sunday morning when worship is held. God delights in good things that delight you. But be careful to obey the specific commands that *are* in the Bible. The optional things have to accommodate those that are required.

### ***Matters of the Heart***

After publicly castigating the Pharisees, Jesus turned to the people to teach them the absolutely vital lesson of this encounter. The reason why traditions, including what we eat, are not such an urgent matter is that they are external. Washing your hands, attending a wedding, celebrating Christmas – these are all external actions. They are not unimportant, but their importance lies in how they reveal the heart. And that is what is really important. We covered this extensively last year when we studied Jesus’ sermon on the mount. Jesus said He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. He said that the members of His Kingdom must keep the law better than the expert law-keepers – the Pharisees. The critical issue – then and now – is the heart. The Pharisees kept the law in appearance, but they did not love God. That is why Jesus called them hypocrites. They acted holy, but their hearts were angry, greedy, selfish, and mean.

Jesus says that our whole lives are determined by our hearts. By heart, Jesus means the non-physical aspect of us – that part of us that thinks and decides. Actions merely reflect what is inside of us. The inside – the heart – is what determines how we act. But Jesus goes further. He says that the sin in our hearts defiles us. An evil heart is a spiritual cancer that grows and spreads and destroys our whole being. An evil heart cannot be corrected by changing your actions. Changed behavior without a changed heart will be temporary and superficial. The heart rules the person. Real change requires a change of heart.

So now you see the significance of the parable of the sower. The different soils represent various heart conditions. The harder the heart, the less the seed of God’s word penetrates and takes root. Just as seed cannot take root in hard soil, God’s word cannot take root in a hard heart. We saw back in chapter three that the Pharisees’ hearts had become hard. Ever since they have been looking for a way to kill Jesus. And now the disciples’ hearts are hard. What will become of them? Will they also turn against Jesus?

### ***Plundering the Strong Man’s House***

The next three stories happen in gentile territory. Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis were all outside of Jewish areas. Sidon is far away from Galilee. It must have taken a long time to walk there. The passage

says that Jesus was trying to hide. This seems to be the vacation he planned when the 5,000 men showed up. At last Jesus and His disciples are getting a break. Vacations are a good thing! But even here someone finds Him – a gentile woman who had a demon possessed daughter. She is not proud. She is willing to admit that Jesus should minister to the Jews at this time, but she begs for just a crumb from His table. She knows that casting out one demon is a small matter for Him. The next story must have some symbolic significance. Remember, what is the secret of the Kingdom? How do you get in? By using your ears that hear. By coming to Jesus with your needs, doubts, and problems. So now Jesus gives ears to a deaf man, and next the whole region comes to hear Jesus. How did they know to do this? From the man in chapter five who had the legion of demons. Jesus' last words to him were, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mark 5:19) Mark writes, "And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled." (v. 20) So now Jesus has returned, and Mr. Demoniac has rounded up 4,000 people to come see Him. Pretty impressive, huh?

Next Jesus will return to the Jewish area of Galilee and spend the rest of His ministry among Jews. So what is the significance of these brief encounters in gentile territory? They are here to show us that from the beginning Jesus planned His Kingdom to include gentiles as well as Jews. This is the beginning of the mission to the whole world. These events show that Jesus has indeed bound the strong man and is plundering his house. Satan is helpless as Jesus ravages his territory. First Jesus set free the man with 6,000 demons. Now he has given the gentiles ears to hear, and they are scrambling to hear Jesus. In a couple of years the disciples will be back, and soon hundreds of thousands will believe in Jesus.

### *Eyes That See*

Meanwhile the disciples are still clueless. Jesus warns them about the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, and they think He is talking about a bread shortage! Jesus hammers them with the critical question, "Do you not yet perceive or understand?" No, they do not understand. What is it the disciples do not understand? That in Jesus' Kingdom, compassion rules. The Pharisees and Herod were selfish. They lusted for the praise of men. They craved the luxuries of life. They hung out only with people like themselves. Meanwhile, Jesus would give up a holiday to teach and feed over 10,000 people. Who are you like? Which life do you wish for yourself? The life of ease and popularity? Or a life of service and hardship? Are you being enticed by the leaven of Herod and the Pharisees? Are you here at Lehigh so that you can get a nice job and earn a lot of money? Are you planning to live a comfortable middle-class lifestyle? Do you pick friends who are like you, who please you? Do you avoid the sick, the injured, the hurting? The demoniac told thousands of people about Jesus. Have you told even one this year? What sort of life are you pursuing?

And then the crushing question, "Are your hearts hardened?" Yes, they are. The disciples have nursed selfish anger in their hearts, and now they are hard. So they have eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear. They cannot remember who Jesus is, or what He did. They are lost. This is the sorry result of pursuing your own path. You may claim to follow Jesus for a while, but soon it becomes obvious that you really do not care about Him. After a while Jesus fades to the fringes of your life.

How can you get ears that hear? Where can you find eyes that see? No doctor or hospital can dispense spiritual ears and eyes. If anyone will hear and see spiritually, Jesus will open His ears and eyes. Just like this blind man at Bethsaida. He was helpless, but Jesus gave him sight. This is a picture of us all. We all were helpless until Jesus gave us sight. If you are here tonight and understand this gospel, if you have a soft heart, it is because Jesus gave it to you. Be assured, you have no reason to boast of your insight or faith. Jesus took you when you were spiritually blind and made you able to see and understand the gospel. For this we will praise him throughout eternity.

Now the disciples see who Jesus is – the Christ. Just as Jesus gave the blind man physical sight, He intervenes and gave spiritual sight to His disciples. Their hearts were hard, but Jesus dug in and broke up the hardness. “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah”. Peter speaks for the disciples who now recognize that Jesus is not just a teacher or prophet. He is the one promised in the prophets – the seed of the woman, the offspring of David, the savior of the world. This is it! They are seeing what faithful Jews for hundreds of years hoped to see. This is the fulfillment of the most important prophecies in all scripture.

But as soon as the disciples understand who Jesus is, they are shocked and dismayed to hear Him declare that He will die. How can this be?! How can Jesus save Israel if He dies? This is an utterly outrageous idea! It is grotesque. Israel will perish, they will perish, prophecy will fail if Jesus dies. Peter, never one to hesitate, took Jesus aside and actually rebuked Him. But Jesus turned around, with His back to Peter, and said, “Get behind me, Satan!” Peter is outraged at Jesus’ prediction, but Jesus will not allow Peter to stop Him.

### *Paying the Price*

Verses 34-38 are the climax of this section of Mark, and in some ways are the main point of the book. We have been building to this point all along, and now we see plainly what it takes to live in Jesus’ Kingdom. You must die. Anyone who would follow Jesus must deny himself and carry his cross. In the first century, the people who carried a cross were those about to die on it. Jesus is saying here, you cannot live for yourself. If you wish to follow Him, you cannot live on your own terms. You will live on Jesus’ terms, or you will not follow Him. He may ask you to go to graduate school. He may send you to a poor neighborhood in some wretched city. He may call you to be a pastor or missionary. He make use you as a witness to paralyzed people by making you crippled for life. And you may die literally. If you would follow Jesus, He will decide your future.

No amount of sweet talk and idle dreaming can change this picture. Jesus is Lord of storms and demons. If you follow Him, He will be your Lord as well. You will do as He says. You have no choice. That is why many people turn away. They find the price too costly. They like life, and they have no interest in dying. They especially like life on their own terms. You know – liberty, the pursuit of happiness – that sort of thing. So they choose not to follow Jesus. They may pretend. In some circles it is advantageous to appear to be a Christian. But their hearts are not with Jesus. They are still hardened against Him.

Why should anyone face a life of dying for Jesus? Because, that is the only way to find life. Here is the gospel paradox: those who choose life will die, but those who choose death will live. The price of following Jesus is your own life. You must die to your own life to follow Him. But the reward is that you get your life back. Better, you get eternal life. However, those who cling to life now will eventually die, and their death is an eternal death.

Every day you are bombarded with millions of lies. They come from the world around you. They well up from within your flesh. They come from Satan himself. They call you to buy this, go here, enjoy sex, play video games, get advanced degrees, make piles of money – and you will have a wonderful life. Every time you go to class, eat a meal, hang out with your friends, watch TV, surf the net – you are lured into a living death. Jesus calls you out of that living death and into real life, eternal life – life that unbelievers can never know or understand.

Everyone must chose between life and death. There is no middle ground. You cannot be partly alive, or partly dead. You will either follow Jesus, and deny yourself – or you will reject Jesus, and live for yourself. The first choice will lead to death now, and life for eternity. The second is for life now, but it means death in eternity. Which will you take? Will you follow Jesus? Will you say to this world, “Get behind me, Satan!” Will you offer yourself to Jesus, to do whatever He calls you to do? Even if it means

hardship, exhaustion, and poverty in this life? Will you flee eternal death and take Jesus' offer of everlasting life?

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