

THE RADICAL DISCIPLE | Dying to Live

Text: Mark 8:34–36; John 12:24–26

Big Idea: Radical disciples embrace death to self because it leads to true life.

A few years ago we were preaching through Ecclesiastes and I was preaching on how one day we are all going to die so we better just accept it now. I had a brilliant idea, maybe you were around to experience it. I designed my own obituary and printed them at the office.

However, I didn't realize I left one in the printer. So Olay comes into the office to use the printer and finds my obituary! It shocked her! Pastor Joel is dead? I think she texted me to make sure I was alive! And I had to apologize profusely and reassure her that I was in fact, alive.

Why did I do that? I wanted to ask myself a question that honestly every Christian should wrestle with..."If my life ended today, what story would people tell?" Not what would they say about my career. Not how many followers I had. How much money I made. Would they say..."He looked a lot like Jesus."

Because that's really what discipleship is. Not simply believing certain truths about Jesus. But becoming the kind of person who increasingly resembles Jesus. And that's where Jesus says something that completely collides with everything our culture tells us. **If you want life...you must die.**

1 | ANSWER THE CALL TO DIE

Mark 8:34

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me."

I love that Jesus never hides the cost. He doesn't recruit disciples the way companies recruit employees. Imagine if a company posted this job description:

"Benefits include hardship, rejection, suffering, and eventually death. Apply below." Not exactly LinkedIn's "Top Places to Work." Jesus never bait-and-switches anyone. He tells you exactly where following Him leads. Notice what He doesn't say. He doesn't say...Come to church. Read your Bible. Pray more before meals. Believe a few correct doctrines.

Those are all wonderful things. But His invitation is much deeper. "If anyone would come after Me..."

"...deny yourself..." "...take up your cross..." "...follow Me."

The first disciples wouldn't have immediately understood what we often miss. Today the cross hangs around our necks. It sits on church buildings. It's stitched onto T-Shirts. But in the 1st century...nobody saw someone carrying a cross and thought, "Oh look...how inspiring." They thought, "That man isn't coming back." The cross wasn't jewelry. It wasn't decoration. It was an instrument of execution. Jesus is saying...Following me requires the death of your old way of life. Now let's be careful. Jesus is not calling us to hate ourselves.

Christianity has never taught that your personality, your gifts, your dreams, or your humanity are bad. He's calling us to put to death the false king sitting on the throne of our hearts.

Me.

My agenda.

My comfort.

My reputation.

My kingdom.

Because here's the reality...most of us don't mind Jesus being our Savior. We struggle with Him being our Lord. We love forgiveness. We don't always love surrender. John Stott writes,

"The Christian community is a community of the cross, for it has been called into being by the cross, and the signature of the cross is upon every one of its members."

In other words, if Jesus died to give us life...why would we expect following him to require anything less than dying to ourselves?

The invitation of Jesus isn't..."Add me to your already busy life."

It's, "Give me your life." And honestly...why would anyone ever choose that? Jesus answers that next.

2 | BELIEVE THE PARADOX OF LIFE THROUGH DEATH

This might be one of the most upside-down teachings Jesus ever gave.

"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it."

Wait...Read that again. Because that's not how life normally works.

Our instincts say...Protect yourself. Promote yourself. Preserve yourself. Jesus says...

That's exactly how you lose yourself. Then over in John 12 He gives us this incredible picture.

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

I don't know about you...But if I'm a seed... Burial doesn't sound like a promotion. It sounds like the end. Imagine a seed saying,

"No thanks. I'd rather stay safe up here on the shelf." Well congratulations. You're safe. You're also alone. You'll never become what you were created to be. The only way a seed fulfills its purpose...is by disappearing into the dirt.

That's the Kingdom of God. God's economy works completely opposite of ours.

We think... Hold tightly. God says... Open your hands. We think... Climb higher. Jesus says...Become a servant.

We think...Win. Jesus says... Lose your life.

Stott summarizes it beautifully: *"The way to live is to die, and the way to die is to live."*

That sentence almost sounds ridiculous. Until you start seeing it everywhere.

The happiest marriages... Are usually made up of two people learning to die to themselves. The healthiest churches...Are filled with servants instead of celebrities.

The strongest friendships... Require sacrifice.

The greatest parents...Give away sleep...comfort...money...time...for their children.

Life has always grown where someone was willing to die. And nowhere is that more true than Jesus Himself. The cross looked like defeat on Friday. But it became victory on Sunday. The empty tomb proves that death never gets the last word with God.

Which means every act of surrender... Every unseen sacrifice...Every quiet act of obedience...Every "yes" to Jesus and every "no" to yourself...Is never wasted. Because in God's Kingdom...

Dying is living. Losing is finding. Giving is receiving. Surrender is gain.

That's the paradox.

And once you believe that... You're finally free to stop clinging to this life... Because you know something infinitely better is coming.

3 | LIVE FOR THE ETERNAL REWARD

John 12:26 "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

Sometimes Christians hear all this talk about dying to self...And we accidentally become spiritual masochists.

Like suffering itself is the goal. I remember being a young Christian and hearing stories about missionaries. Part of me thought, "Let's go die for Jesus somewhere!" As if the objective was simply to suffer. That's not Christianity.

Jesus never glorifies pain. He glorifies what waits beyond it. Listen to His promise.

"Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, My servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves Me."

Did you catch all the promises packed into one verse? If you follow Jesus... There is fruitfulness. There is eternal life. There is fellowship with Christ. "There My servant also will be." Can you imagine that?

The greatest reward of heaven isn't a mansion. Or golden streets. Or even seeing loved ones again. It's Jesus. Where He is... We'll be. And then Jesus says something astonishing.

"My Father will honor the one who serves Me."

Just let that settle for a moment. The Creator of the universe... The One before whom angels cover their faces... Will one day honor faithful servants. Not because we've earned it. But because He's that gracious.

John Stott says,

"The way of self-denial is not the way of loss but of true fulfillment."

Church...

The radical disciple doesn't embrace death because he loves suffering. He embraces death because he trusts Jesus. He believes that every surrender... Every sacrifice... Every cross... Leads somewhere. The world says, "You only live once." Jesus says, "You only truly live once you've died." Death isn't the end of life. For the Christian... It's the doorway into it.

RESPONSE

When Olay found my eulogy sitting in the printer... It forced me to ask a question. If someone had to summarize my life today... What would they write? But here's the good news.

Tonight...

Nobody else has to write your story. You still do.

Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself."*

Today I'm inviting you to bring your life to Jesus... Before someone else has to summarize it. As our worship team comes... I'd like to invite you to come forward and take one of these blank legacy pages.

One day someone else will write the last chapter of your earthly story. But by God's grace... You still get to write the next page. So here's the question. What in your life still needs to die...so that Christ's life can truly flourish?

Come and surrender it to Him.