

NO CHEAP SEATS

Key Verse: Mark 8:34-38

Key Thought: Anything that has Worth Will Cost you Something.

Last month was the Super Bowl. Millions of people watched the San Francisco 49ers lose to the Kansas City Chiefs. I am a football fan, and I was curious to know what it would cost to see the game. After a few moments of research, I discovered that there are no cheap seats for the Super Bowl. The tickets I found ranged from \$1,674.00 in the nosebleed section all the way up to \$11,668.00 for a pretty good seat near the 50-yard line. No matter how you slice it, it costs some big bucks to go to the Super Bowl. There are no cheap seats!

If you want to see Taylor Swift in concert, expect to pay between \$1000.00 and \$2,000.00. If you want to see an old rock band named Journey expect to pay between \$100.00 and \$500.00. It will cost you at least \$250.00 to go to the race in Daytona. It will cost nearly a hundred bucks to see either a Montreal or Ottawa hockey game . There are no cheap seats!

Jesus wants to teach us the same thing about being His follower. He wants us to know that there are *No Cheap Seats* in His service.

Jesus has just revealed His identity to His disciples. He has just told them that He must die for their sins on the cross. He has just shattered every notion and dream they held concerning the Messiah.

As soon as that information is given out, Jesus calls His disciples to come around Him. He also calls the crowds to gather near where they can hear. Then Jesus begins to speak. As He does, Jesus tells the gathered crowd that there is a high price attached to being His follower. The words of Jesus in these verses strike a death blow to the cheap, easy, feel-good religion that is being passed off as Christianity in these days.

Many believe they can have Jesus and the world too. Many believe they can claim to be followers of Christ, while they live their lives as they please. Jesus lets us know in no uncertain terms that such notions are utterly false. If a person is going to be a follower of Jesus Christ, there is a very high price to pay.

This passage makes it clear that there are No Cheap Seats for followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to show you what Jesus has to say about this matter of being His follower. In these verses, Jesus Shares A Pattern; Jesus Shares A Paradox and Jesus Shares A Penalty. Let us take some time today to unpack these verses and see what He has to say to us.

I. JESUS SHARES A PATTERN

Jesus would have been a public relations manager's nightmare! Every time He began to attract a large following, Jesus would up the ante. He would tell them how high the cost of following Him would be and the crowds would vanish. Jesus did this so that people would know the truth. He wanted them to know that it would not be cheap or easy to be His disciples. It is a serious thing to make a profession of faith! In this verse, Jesus shares a pattern for true discipleship.

Let me remind you that not everyone who claims to be a Christian can truly be called a disciple of Jesus. Those who would be His disciples, His followers have four requirements that they must meet in this life. Let me share them with you today.

“Come After Me” – When Jesus said these words, His men surely remembered when He first called them to follow Him. Some 2 ½ years ago, they had left everything to follow Jesus. They had left family, friends, occupations, and everything else in their lives to go with Jesus.

To the rest of the crowd that day, this was a call to the new birth. It was a call to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It was a call for them to turn their backs on everything else to go after Jesus.

Being born again or getting saved, is far more than praying a prayer in an altar. A lot of people come to an altar, pray a prayer, and profess to know Jesus Christ. True salvation is about a radical commitment to leave the old life behind to follow Jesus into a new and very different life. Being born again is about being made a “new creation”.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

2 Corinthians 5:17

You see, you can pray the Sinner’s Prayer all day and not get saved. You walk the Roman Road, take a Journey through John, or go through any other method that people say brings salvation. The fact is, you only get saved when God convicts you of your sins and draws you to Himself,

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

John 6:44

When He draws you and you respond by faith, salvation takes place.

True salvation, however is not some form of “***easy believing***” that leaves you unchanged. True salvation, when it happens in your life, will make such a radical change in your life that you will begin to act like a different person. Your desires and habits will change. Your interests and commitments will change.

When you come to Jesus Christ and are truly saved, you will want to follow Him. Where Jesus is, is where you will desire to be.

“Deny Himself” – This phrase literally means, ***“to completely disown, to utterly separate oneself from someone.”*** It is the same word used to describe Peter’s denial of Jesus outside the high priest’s home.

Denying self is not the same thing as self-denial. Some people will practice self-denial by withholding certain things from themselves, like some people do during Lent. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

Denying self is far more intense than that. Denying self implies that I stop listening to my own voice. I stop leaning on my own power. I stop trying to fulfill my own will and wishes.

When I truly deny myself, I have no will but His will. I have no plans but His plans. I have no wants but what He wants for me. When I deny myself, I give up all my rights and I relinquish all control of my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I live out ***1 Corinthians 6:19-20,***

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies..”

That is a concept that is foreign in our day! Most religions and most popular ministries are focused on catering to self. They want people to feel good about themselves. They want to build up people’s self-esteem. They want mankind to rejoice in his achievements and in his or her abilities.

Jesus, on the other hand, wants mankind to know that without Him, they are nothing and can do nothing. Jesus is calling those who claim Him as their Savior to make a total commitment to His Lordship in their lives, by giving absolute control in every area of our lives. This phrase suggests a ***“once for all action”***. We are to deny ourselves and to forget about us.

“Take Up His Cross” – This phrase had much meaning for the people in Jesus’ day. Historians estimate that over 30,000 people were crucified by the Romans during Jesus’ lifetime. Thus, every person who heard Jesus say these words knew what He was saying to them.

In that day, a cross was not a piece of jewelry or a symbol on a church building. A cross was an instrument of shame, humiliation, suffering, torture, and death. When a man took up his cross, he was beginning a death march. When a man took up his cross, he carried the instrument of his own death on his own shoulders. When he reached his destination, he was laid down on the cross he had carried; he was nailed to it; he suffered on it, and he died on it.

When Jesus called these people to take up their cross, they knew exactly what He was talking about! Sadly, that message has become clouded in our day.

Some people think that the burdens of life are a cross they must bear. Some people say that a lost, abusive spouse, a wayward child, or a crazy boss is their cross. Some people think that an illness or a physical handicap is their cross. The trials and hardships you face in this life are not your cross! When Jesus tells His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him, He is calling us to die to ourselves. He is calling us to commit to a lifestyle of living death,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20.

He is calling us to willingly bear the ***shame***, the ***reproach***, the ***humiliation***, the ***suffering***, the ***hatred***, the ***alienation*** and even the ***death*** that may come to those who are associated with Him.

We take up our cross when we choose the narrow way over the way of the world, regardless of the cost. We take up our cross when we live out biblical ethics in our personal lives and in our business relationships, regardless of the cost. We take up our cross when we are willing to suffer any attack for Jesus' sake.

Not many people are truly carrying their cross today. Many are quick to compromise when it makes their way just a little easier. Businessmen will lie to keep their customers. Christians will lie to save face. Church folks will compromise with the world to avoid being singled out and humiliated for being a believer. To take up your cross means that you are willing to identify yourself with Jesus Christ, His death, and His word, regardless of what it costs you personally, publicly, or financially! That's not a side of Christianity you hear about very often! It isn't popular to talk about sacrifice, death, and suffering, but that is what Christianity is all about! There are no cheap seats, but there is a high price to pay for being a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just ask Paul – *2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-11*

This phrase also suggests a “*once for all*” action. I am to take up my cross and never lay it down until I reach the place of my death.

“*Follow Me*” – The true disciple of Jesus turns his back on his self and his old life. The true disciple of Jesus takes up his cross and is willing to lay down everything for the glory of God. The true disciple of Jesus takes his place behind the Lord, and he follows Jesus wherever He leads. The true disciple walks in total obedience and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ!

This phrase suggests “*ongoing*” action. Jesus is calling His people to be constant followers. Some people follow on Sunday but take a different path on Monday. Some people follow the Lord when they need help, but take another path when things get better.

That is not what the Lord is looking for! Jesus is calling for His people to make a radical commitment to follow Him all the time, all the way to the end of their lives.

I am trying to teach you today that there are no cheap seats in this thing called Christianity. It costs something to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And only those willing to follow Him all the way have the goods,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Matthew 7:21-23

Can we honestly say that we are totally committed to Jesus when other things in life come before Him? Can we honestly say that we are following Him when we do as we please when we please? Can you honestly say that you are bearing your cross when you can't even be faithful to the church? Isn't it about time that God's children examined the priorities so that Jesus Christ and His will came first?

The price of discipleship is high, isn't it? There really are no cheap seats! If you think you can pray a simple prayer and go to Heaven while you still live life as you please, you are deceiving yourself! If you think that going to church and doing a few religious things are enough to secure you a home in Heaven, you are deceiving yourself. Genuine salvation is about a radical commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The key word there is **“Lord”**. When you come to Him for salvation, you are giving up all your rights.

You are making a radical, eternal commitment to live as He sees fit. Genuine salvation produces drastic changes in the lives of all who receive it.

II. JESUS SHARES A PARADOX

These three verses are designed to teach us that the spiritual side of our lives is far more important than the material side. That is not the way most people think. Most people live their entire lives trying to take care of the physical and material needs they have in life, while they give little attention to the spiritual side of life. Jesus wants us to know that only the spiritual side of life really matters in the end.

· ***The Way to Save Your Life Is to Lose It – v. 35*** – This verse is a paradox. A paradox is a statement that seems contradictory but is still true. Jesus says that if you believe that having your own way, living life on your own terms and being your own lord is more important than surrendering to His Lordship, you will lose your life. However, if you yield your life to Him, giving up total control over all you have and are to Him, you will actually save it. From a human perspective this makes no sense, but from heaven’s viewpoint, nothing else makes sense.

You have a choice. You can live your life as you see fit. You can refuse to come to Jesus Christ for salvation. You can call all the shots. You can be your own boss. You can do as you please, living your life on your own terms, but in the end, you will lose your life. When you reach the end of your way, you will find that there is nothing but an eternity in Hell waiting for you.

On the other hand, you can commit your life to Jesus. You can deny your own will, give up all your rights, surrender to His Lordship and follow Him faithfully. At the end of that way, His way, you will find that the door of Heaven will be opened to you. So, in the economy of God, “Losers are Keepers.”

Those who lose their lives by giving them up for Jesus are winners in the end. While those who live for this life alone, lose everything in the end. What kind of ending do you anticipate? There are no cheap seats!

· In verse 36, Jesus asks a powerful question. Think about it for just a moment.

Imagine that you possessed the whole world and all the riches in it. Imagine that you could do anything you wanted to do, be anything you wanted to be, or go anywhere you wanted to go. Imagine that you were the absolute ruler of all material things. Sounds like a dream come true, doesn't it? Now, imagine at the end of that experience of having, being and doing as you please, that you die. Now, imagine that after death you found yourself in Hell forever. Would those few years, or even decades, of pleasure be worth an eternity in Hell?

Jesus told a story about a man who experienced such a fate, *Luke 16:19-31*. That man lived his life in the lap of luxury and then he died and went to Hell. When he arrived there, all the money, all the pleasure and all the power he had enjoyed in this life were useless to him in Hell. He had lost his soul; thus, he had lost everything.

Let's be realistic. Most people in this room will never know what it is like to possess riches, power, and the ability to do as you please. So, imagine that you live your life, doing all the things that you want to do, and when you reach the end of your life you die. You have worked hard all your life. You have done without, endured hardship and suffered, but you have lived life on your terms. Then you die and still; go to Hell. Where is the profit in that? What have you gained? You have gained nothing, but you have lost everything! That's why you need to come to Jesus, and you need to do it today.

Jesus asks another powerful question in **verse 37**. *What is the worth of your soul?* Before you answer, let me remind you that your soul is the only part of you that will live forever. Your body will die and be buried, but your soul will live on in either Heaven above or in Hell beneath. So, what is your soul worth?

Are you willing to trade your eternal soul for alcohol or drugs? Are you willing to trade your soul for a sexual relationship? Are you willing to trade your soul for the right to do as you please and live life on your own terms? Are you willing to spend eternity in Hell for a few years of being your own god?

If you are lost, that is exactly what you are doing! You are trading the most valuable possession you have for the trinkets of this world. You have bought into the lie of the devil, and you are going to lose all you have and all you are in a place called Hell. It's not too late to change the road you are on. Come to Jesus today and trade this world in for a permanent, eternal relationship with Him. Trade Hell for Heaven today!

In about 1,000 AD the tomb of Charlemagne, the King of the Franks, was opened. The great king had been dead for about 180 years by then. When they opened his tomb, they found great treasure, but they also encountered an amazing site.

They saw the skeleton of Charlemagne sitting on a throne, with a crown still sitting on the skull. In the bony hands of that skeleton was a copy of the Gospels. A bony finger was pointing to this text, *“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Charlemagne was a great king, but in the end, none of that mattered. When it came time for him to die, he left his robes, his riches, and his royalty behind and he went out into eternity to meet his God.

When you and I reach the end of our earthly journey, nothing we have achieved or accumulated in this life will matter. All that will matter in that hour is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. All that will matter is that we willingly lose our lives to His will so that He might live through us.

What will you find at your journey's end?

III. JESUS SPEAKS OF A PENALTY

Jesus has a word here for those who reject His message. He refers to those who are “ashamed” of Him and His words. The word “**ashamed**”, in this context, means “*unwilling or restrained because of fear of shame, ridicule, or disapproval.*” It refers to those who will not come to Jesus for salvation and who will not follow Him because they refuse to accept Him or His message.

When a person comes to Jesus and begins to follow Him, there is a price to pay. The believer rejects the world and its ways, choosing instead to walk with Jesus. The believer must be willing to be persecuted, reproached, and even hated for the cause of Christ.

Not everyone is willing to pay such a price. Those who refuse to come to Jesus and live a separated life prove that they want no part of Him or His message. These people will face a terrible judgment when Jesus comes. Just as they have refused to acknowledge Him, He will refuse to acknowledge them. They will face Him in judgment, and they will be cast into Hell. “*I never knew you,*” *Matthew 7:21-22*

The true believer may suffer in this life, but the true believer will enter the joys of Heaven when this life ends. The lost person, on the other hand, might enjoy the best this world has to offer, but when this life is ended, they will face God in judgment. Jesus can offer Victory over the patterns and paradox and the penalty of sin.

All we must do is look at Jesus on that cross. He paid the penalty for us and that thief. Remember the two thieves? The one was not sitting in a cheap seat, was he? He was about to pay the ultimate price for his sin. But instead of being all about himself like the other thief, he does something different. He asks Jesus into his life and asks Him to allow him to follow into paradise. Jesus sees the heart, true repentance, and allows him to follow to eternal life. Let us remember that even though Jesus was God, as He hung on that cross, He was experiencing the same anguish and torments that the two thieves were experiencing. The agony was unimaginable, and the suffering Jesus endured was very real. His death was a brutal, horrific affair. It was far worse than the mind could comprehend. His pain was far more than physical. While He was on that cross, He literally became sin! He was judged as if He were sin itself! His judgment as sin was so complete, that He was literally alienated from His Father as He was judged, *Matthew 27:46*. And, even as Jesus endured all that He did at the hands of men; He was doing it for you and me. He was doing it for that thief who cried out in simple, child-like faith. He was enduring it all so that you could bow before Him and ask Him to save your soul. He was doing it to say to you, "I love you!"

Even as Jesus' grace was there as he hung there in agony that day; His heart was on finding His Own lost sheep. That was why He came, and that was why He left the 99, and went after the lost sheep, *Luke 15:3-7*.

The grace of God was in evidence that day even as Jesus died on the cross. Anyone else might have looked at that poor, dying thief and said, "You rejected the way of God in your life; now go to Hell in your death!" But not Jesus! He loved that sinner in spite of his sins, and He extended grace to him. When Jesus spoke to this man; He spoke words seasoned with grace, love, and mercy.

He received that poor man just like he was, with all the baggage of a wasted life, and Jesus saved his soul, on the spot!

He hasn't changed one bit! It doesn't matter where your road of life has carried you. It does not matter what you have done in your life. If you come to Jesus, you will find a friend who will receive you just like you are. He will love you, save you, change you and make a new creature out of you. He will cleanse you of your sins and give you a brand-new start. He will save your soul! That is what He did for the thief. That is what He did for me. That is what He has done for countless others, and that is what He will do for you, if you will come to Him!

The thief was looking for something from Jesus way down the road. What he received was a promise that everything he was looking for had just been proved to him by his simple cry of faith. Jesus gave him a guarantee that his eternity was forever altered; and that the changes would begin immediately!

You see, Jesus died first, John 19:32-33, and preceded the thief into Paradise. Can you imagine the scene that greeted Jesus when He entered the place where the departed saints waited for the day that Jesus would come and die on the cross and pay their sin debt? There must have been rejoicing as Abraham, Joseph, David, and legions of others gathered around Him and praised the Lord for what He had just accomplished. Maybe Abraham said, "Lord, please come in and sit down with us. Tell us about all the things you have accomplished for us today." I think Jesus might have answered, "No, I'll be along in a little while. I am going to wait here near the gate for I am expecting a friend."

In closing, I want you to see that there are plenty of cheap seats in a local church. A person can attend here, occupy their seats and it will cost them nothing. Others do the work; pay the bills and are willing to bear the reproach of Christ before a lost world.

But there are no cheap seats in the body of Christ. It costs something to be a true believer. It costs something to be a genuine disciple of Jesus. True Christianity demands our all! Genuine discipleship demands nothing less than that we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus all the way, even to death if necessary.

Joining a church will cost you nothing, but coming to Christ will cost you everything! There are no cheap seats in Jesus Christ, but every place in Him is priceless. For those willing to pay the price, there is a home in Heaven and eternal glory. For those who shrink back from the shame of the cross, there is nothing but judgment.

Has the Lord spoken to your heart today? Are you saved by His grace? Are you as committed to Jesus as these verses teach that you should be? Let's obey Him as He calls us to Him today.

Place: FCA

Date: March 17, 2024

Time: 10:30am

After Service Song: Em – Lead Me To The Cross