

3 – “Follower or Consumer?” //

Mark 8:27–38 // *Phantom Faith*

#3

Most of you know what an oxymoron is, right? It's when contradictory terms appear in conjunction, like “jumbo shrimp;” “act naturally,” “genuine Imitation,” “tight slacks,” “airline food,” “Adorable cat,” “Government efficiency,” or “Microsoft Works.”

Today I want to talk about what is probably the worst oxymoron of them all: *half-committed Christian*.

Many people are **trying to be** half-committed Christians; they want **just enough of Jesus** to get them to heaven, but not enough to make them radical, or a fanatic.

According to Jesus, **there is no much thing as a half-committed follower**.

This is our final week in a short series called Phantom Faith...

- Because we're talking about people who go through the motions of Christianity, but without the soul.
 - (I wanted to call it **zombie faith** but our creative director told me I could not do any sermon series with the word “zombie” in the title... My passive aggressive way is using it as an example each week—my way of sticking it to her)
- A lot of people go through the motions of Christianity, but they are missing something... and they usually know it. There is very little passion in their lives, very little joy... very little soul.

We've looked at 3 misconceptions that keep people from the soul of Christianity.

- The first week, we looked at what how so few people actually understand what it means to be saved by faith—
- The second week, we **explored how Christian salvation is about more** than “just forgiveness;” it is about resurrection power, transformation of our lives from the inside out.
- This week, I want to look at what is perhaps the **biggest contributor of them all** to phantom faith...

Before I unpack what that is... I want to remind you that we're *following up each week with an invitation to be baptized. Baptism is supposed to be your first act of obedience after you come to faith in Christ.*

- *Some of you have **never been baptized** since coming to faith; for some of you've come to Christ **recently** (some during this series).*
 - **Others of you have been Christians for years** but you've never taken this step, and it's time you quit putting that off.
- *Last week we had **130 people** at all our campuses come forward to be baptized... more today.*

The largest contributor to phantom faith is the idea that you can be partially committed to Jesus...

This misconception **begins with how most of us came to God**.

Most of us came to God as a **consumer**; he had something we needed...

- You felt like you were **missing something**, like life was too overwhelming to go through it without God
 - You went through a crisis...
- Some were **scared to go to hell**...
- Others felt like they **needed religion to have a stable** family
 - I see many people get back into church because they don't want their kids to grow up outside the faith
- Or, maybe you just felt like you needed religion to be a good person

Whatever it was, you came to Jesus because we believed he could supply what we really needed.

- *And there is nothing really wrong with that. God uses our need to show us that we need him.*

But here was the mistake: we thought that Christianity primarily consisted in getting something from Jesus rather than surrendering ourselves to Jesus; we assumed that **Jesus was someone we can add to our life rather than someone to whom we offered our lives.**

Jesus seems to have dealt with this all the time.

Mark 8:27–38

- He actually has to deal with it in the future head of the church, Peter.
- (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who was killed for participating in an assassination plot against Adolf Hitler, pointed out what Jesus says to Peter here is **one of the few things recorded in all 4 Gospels**, which means that it must have been something that Jesus said all the time...)
 - John 3:16—only in there once. Jesus said this so much every gospel writer included it!
 - You get mad at me for repeating same stories and points? Jesus did it all the time so deal...

Let's start in vs. [27] And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" [28] And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

[29] And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." Now, this is a big, big deal. **The Jews had been waiting for the "Christ"** (which just means, "the promised one") for more than **3000 years**.

The Christ, God had said, would overthrow Roman oppression, right all wrongs, stop injustice and put an end to the curse.

Peter says, "Jesus, we recognize that you are that one!"

31 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.

Well, this **did not make any sense** to Peter. A Messiah that *suffers*? The Christ was supposed to put an end to suffering, not suffer himself!

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. *(Every week I have a group of guys who, after the 1st service, critique my sermon. What I said poorly; factual mistakes I made; jokes that were lame... Takes a bold move to do give that kind of sermon critique with Jesus.)*

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."

(BTW, **one of the reasons we know the Bible is authentic** is that it records encounters like this. Peter would one day lead the church, and here in their founding documents they included a story where Jesus calls him "Satan." Be honest: **If you were making up stories to gain support for your religious movement, is this the kind of thing you'd make up?** Imagine you were trying to get someone skeptical to come to church with you... is this the kind of thing you'd be excited to tell them? "*Hey, come to our church—our pastor flunked out of seminary and then Jesus called him 'the great Satan.'*" No, they put this in there because it was true.)

Now, typically, **rebukes are the kind of thing you do privately**, right? That Jesus did this publicly must have meant that what Peter said was so wrong and dangerous that it needed to be dealt with publicly. (See

vs. 33 where it says, “**he turned and saw the disciples**”? This needed to be corrected for them.)

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples (everybody needed to hear how dumb Peter’s statement was, and then God had it recorded in the Bible so we could talk about it for the next 2000 years), **he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**

What Jesus said **here was shocking**, and sometimes we can lose the impact of it because “**cross**” **doesn’t conjure up the same images** for us it did to them...

For us, the cross has become a **sentimental symbol** of our faith. We decorate our houses with it; or we wear it around our neck, made out of gold or diamonds...

- I once knew someone who collected decorative crosses from around the world and kept them on the wall...
- There was nothing sentimental or decorative for them about the cross. It was an image of oppression, and death, and torture...
- It would be **like a freed slave** in the 19th century wearing a little lynching rope around their neck.

Today, you go over to someone’s house and they have a cross above their kitchen table or one on the wall in their infant’s room and you don’t think anything about it.

- But imagine going over to someone’s house and above their table they have a picture of someone before a **firing squad**. Then you go into the nursery and **dangling from their mobile above the crib** are some little hangman’s nooses.
- You are not going to say, “Oh, how sweet!” You are going to tell your kids, “We don’t really play at this person’s house.”

I’m not trying to tell you that you shouldn’t wear a cross or decorate your houses with it... just for you to make sure you don’t lose the shock of it...

Jesus **uses this image to confront** a Satanic perversion of faith, but one held commonly by Christians—even by Peter, at this point in his life.

It is called **consumer faith**, and it has **3 elements**:

The 3 Elements of Consumer Faith

1. You have consumer faith if you expect Christ to remove all hardship from your life

Peter **assumed the Messiah would end** all suffering for God’s people.

- And **this wasn’t without warrant**—the OT repeatedly promised that a Messiah would come and end injustice, right all wrongs, end suffering...
 - But there was **also talk in the OT about a Servant God** would send who would suffer... and who this Person would be was confusing to Jewish people
 - but **they never dreamed that the Suffering Servant** and the **Conquering Christ** were the same Person.

So Peter, along with most Jews of his time, couldn’t conceive of a suffering Messiah...

Peter expresses the heart of Christian immaturity: *Jesus Christ came so that I wouldn’t suffer.*

- But Jesus said, “No, Peter, I’m not going to save you from suffering; I am going to save you through suffering.”
 - And I’m not going to stop your pain; I am going to redeem your pain, and give it meaning, and use it to bring life to yourself and the world...
- And **Jesus tells Peter** that until he understands this he should stop speaking for Jesus.
 - Vs 30: don’t tell anyone I’m the Christ *until you understand this!*

- “Get behind me, Satan! Peter, *shut your mouth until you understand this.*”

You see, many immature Christians still assume that salvation means that all suffering in your life will end, and if you suffer, God is somehow not keeping up his end of the deal.

But Jesus says, “Salvation doesn’t end the problems in your life; sometimes they intensify. My promise is that in these problems, I will be working to produce life.”

When you find out that he may not remove every problem from your life, you go through a test, like Peter did:

Why are you following Jesus?

Are you following him because of what you think he can provide for you, or because you believe he is more valuable than life itself?

You see, all of us have certain expectations of Jesus. You don’t have the same expectations that Peter did: he **believed the Messiah would overthrow Rome** and give freedom to Israel. Most of you didn’t grow up dreaming of **war with Rome** (unless you’re a video gamer)...

but we grow up with a view of Jesus that corresponds with our consumeristic culture: We think of **God who is part genie in a bottle, part therapist, life coach, personal cheerleader, financial advisor.** A God who exists for your purposes; a Go at your beck and call.

What are you going to do when Jesus doesn’t fit your expectations?

It is going to be a moment of truth... Are you going to throw up your hands and walk away?

It doesn’t record this here, but one time when Jesus made statements like this one a lot of people quit following him—they were like, “Whoa, we were all about the healing and the blessing and the solid families, not the cross.”

- Jesus then turned to Peter and said, “Peter, are you going to leave also?” What Peter says is not inspiring. Peter throws up his hands and says, “Where else am I going to go?” You have the words of eternal life.” In other words, I am frustrated by you, but at the end of the day I’d rather have you and nothing else than anything without you.”
- Peter passed his test. Will you?
- You will go through it! I see it all the time. The cancer doesn’t go in remission; the loved one dies; the marriage doesn’t get better; the kids don’t come back.

2. You have consumer faith if you think of discipleship in terms of self-fulfillment instead of sacrifice.

Peter thought of the Christ has someone who would make his life better. But now Jesus starts talking about willingly picking up a cross—this is not a completion of his life, but a **forfeiture** of his life.

The **time it became clear** to me... Not going well. **Sacrifice.**

- Is that the kind of picture you want to characterize your life? Is that what you were **expecting** when you came to Jesus?
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it best: “*When Jesus bids a man to follow him, he bids him come and die.*”

What do you think Jesus’ purpose was in saving you? Many people assume that becoming a Christian just means cleaning up your life and in response you get God’s help and he takes you to heaven.

- Jesus said it means offering yourself without restriction to him; **offering up your life** for the world the way that he did his.

Have you ever offered yourself to God this way?

- I've told you before that really following Jesus means having a **Copernican revolution**... What I mean by that is that up until the time of Copernicus everyone thought the universe rotated around the earth... the revolution was, "The sun is at the center, not me."
- I need God to give me this. Discipleship means, "It all exists for you."
- ***Or, to quote my friend David Platt: Jesus didn't save us to disinfect you and put you on the shelf; he saved you to put you into service.***
- ***Have you offered yourself to Jesus this way?***

3. You have consumer faith if your obedience to Christ has limits.

Peter had been excited about following Jesus when it meant healing, and power, and popularity. If you remember, he'd walked away from a **lucrative fishing career**.

But now Jesus is talking about following him into a life of suffering, and sacrifice, and service.

Jesus confronts Peter with a question: *Peter, are you following me because what you think I will do for you, or are you following me to be with me?* Because really following me means going with me through the highs and lows—not for what you can get out of it, *but for who you can be with.*¹ Is there a limit to, or condition, on your surrender to me?

Write this down: Salvation is free; it costs us nothing. But following Jesus will eventually cost you something. Maybe everything.²

At some point your desires are going to go one way, and Jesus is going to tell you to go the other, and at that point you're going to

have to decide how valuable he is to you. Here's what I see... He tells you...

- To end a relationship you don't want to end (e.g. dating unbeliever?)
- To follow him somewhere in mission
- To change your career or your major
- To make a financial sacrifice
- To forgive (and you don't want to!)
- To speak the gospel to a certain person
- For some of you, he is telling you to get off the sidelines and join the church. We've got a whole group of people for whom *church is just a weekend event—Jesus was clear that he didn't want you to be a spectator, but actively engaged in the mission. A member of the church. To belong be a part of the ministries. You like coming to get some religious inspiration but Jesus says I want you to serve.*
- For others, it is simply the call is to be baptized. If you can't get wet for Jesus, can you really follow him?

At some point, obedience to Jesus is going to take in a direction 180 degrees opposite of what you want. In that moment you will have to answer the question: ***Did I come to Jesus to get something from him, or offer myself to him?***

- *Do I want something from Jesus, or do I just want Jesus?*

Illus. Blank check: "If you are less than 35, let me tell you what this is.. it's a check. How we used to give money to each other. When you fill in a blank check like this one and give it to someone, it's a defining moment in your relationship. I think I know you... but I've seen enough movies to know you may not be who I think you are—CIA, terrorist. You could clean me out if you're not who I think you are?"

- Not a gift card
- Not a filled out check
- "All I am; all I have; all I ever hope to be..."

¹ From Andy Stanley, sermon on Mark 8:32–28

² Adapted from Stanley.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it best: “When Jesus bids a man to follow him, he bids him come and die.”

3 Motivations

Jesus’ demands on you are total. And that’s big... and so in this passage Jesus gives 3 motivations:

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.

(A) God brings life through obedience. Obedience to Jesus sometimes feels like death, but through that obedience God brings life.

- The **forgiveness you offer** is going to restore a relationship and release you from bitterness.
- The **relationship you walk away from** is going to open up the possibility for a healthy, life-giving relationship for you and them. (*I see it all the time!*)
- That **ministry you engage** in, or the career change, is going to not only bring life to someone else, but also become a renewal of your own faith or maybe your kids’ faith.
- God takes your **financial sacrifice** and brings *life* through it—not just through the ministries that you give it to, but in your heart as well.
- Obedience *feels* like death, but it is God’s instrument of life!

2nd motivation: 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?

B) You can’t hold on to it anyway.

- Whatever you are holding onto—that keeps you from full surrender to Jesus—**inevitably you are going to lose it** anyway.
- Jesus asks the question: What would you hang onto now that would be worth your soul then?

- I know of **college students** who won’t consider the Lordship of Jesus because they want to **hold onto sexual freedom**. I want to shake them and ask, “Is that really worth it?” They say, “**Well, yes, I’m having fun now.**” You really feel like the memory of some brief sexual escapades is worth your soul for eternity?
- Or I know many people who reject the Lordship of Jesus **because they want out of their marriage or to be with someone new**. *Is leaving your marriage for a new spouse worth your soul? Are you going to comfort each other in hell?*
- Is **control over your career**, or your calendar your finances, worth rejecting Jesus?
 - *Heard a guy say... When they bury you they put you in a death suit; it never has any pockets...*
- Whatever you are holding onto now you’re going to lose anyway one day... Why would you trade your eternal soul for it?
- **Jim Elliot**: He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.
- **How I illustrate it to teenagers...**

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.”

(C) Jesus was not ashamed of you. The irony of this verse is that **Jesus, who should have been ashamed of us, wasn’t**. The cross he picked up for us was **voluntary**.

- He’s the only one with **nothing to gain**, and everything to lose.

Yet, out of love for me, he identified himself with me and picked up a cross to save me. Is this not a God worth leaving everything for?

- **Fajar**: I would go anywhere with him regardless of what I have to leave behind.
 - **Yours not as dramatic, but substance must be the same.**

- **Peter would pick up a literal cross...**
- At some point, following Jesus will cost you... have you given him everything?
 - We complain about having to switch service times, nights of small group...
 - How dare they ask me to serve in the nursery, or to give... are we even having the same conversation? Jesus is talking about you picking up a cross, and you're complaining about inconvenience?

Blank check: "All I am, all I have, all I ever hope to be..."