

Would You Rather?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 August 2023

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Mark, Mark chapter 8.

Mark chapter 8, if you've got the Pew Bible open, it's on page 1018, page 1018. Mark chapter 8, and I want us to think about verses 36 and 37.

Mark chapter 8, at verse 36, where Jesus asks, For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit or lose his soul?

And what can a man give in return or exchange for his soul? What shall it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Have you ever listened to children having a conversation?

[1 : 16] Have you ever listened to children having a conversation? It can be a very enlightening experience. Sometimes it can actually be a very entertaining experience. When we were away at Keswick at the convention this year, Finlay, he met one of the children from the Keswick Convention holiday clubs.

What always amazes me about children is that when they meet one another, there's never any awkwardness and there's never any apprehension of starting a conversation. They just seem to strike up a conversation and then keep it going for half an hour or even longer.

And Finlay and his newfound friend, Josh, they kept this conversation going by playing the game, would you rather? Would you rather? It's a very simple game.

In fact, I don't think you can actually call it a game because there's never really a winner to it. Because all you're doing is asking the simple question, would you rather? So for example, would you rather tea or coffee?

For me, it's always coffee. Would you rather a roast beef or roast chicken? Well, it's roast beef always. Would you rather Rangers or Celtic? Always Rangers.

[2 : 28] Would you rather Burger King or McDonald's? Always McDonald's. Would you rather chocolate or crisps? Always chocolate. So you get the idea. And you can ask any question you like.

Would you rather be a bird in the air or a submarine under the sea? But Finlay and Josh, they carried on playing this game for a good half an hour. But as they did, you know, it got me thinking about another question, a question that Jesus asks, a would you rather question that Jesus asks us in the gospel.

And of course, when Jesus asks his would you rather question, it's not a game. And it's not a joke. It's actually quite a solemn and quite a serious question.

Because what Jesus asks us here in Mark chapter 8 is the question, would you rather gain the whole world and lose your soul or gain salvation and save your soul?

Would you rather gain the whole world and lose your soul or gain salvation and save your soul?

[3 : 36] And by the way, Jesus asks his would you rather question. I hope the answer is obvious. And I hope everyone chooses the right answer.

This morning, I want us to think about this passage in Mark chapter 8 under two headings. Listening and learning and losing and living. Listening and learning and losing and living.

So first of all, listening and learning. Listening and learning. Now look back at verse 27. Verse 27. But it says there, Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

And on the way he asked his disciples, who do people say I am? And they told him, John the Baptist and others say Elijah and others one of the prophets. And he asked them, but who do you say I am?

Peter answered him, you are the Christ. The gospel of Mark is Mark's good news message all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[4 : 45] In fact, that's how Mark begins his gospel message. He begins in chapter 1, verse 1, by saying the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And then Mark concludes his gospel by recording a confession of a Roman centurion standing at the cross of Jesus Christ, saying, surely this man was the Son of God.

And between those two statements, between those two bookends, Mark emphasizes and explains to us that Jesus Christ really is the Son of God, and He really is the only Savior of sinners.

But you know, what I love about Mark's gospel is that Mark's gospel, it divides into two sections. Because as you can see, Mark's gospel is 16 chapters long.

The first eight chapters, they seek to answer the question, who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? And through all the messages and all the miracles of Jesus, Mark teaches us and he tells us that Jesus, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

[5 : 54] But then in the second half of Mark's gospel, in the remaining eight chapters, Mark seeks to answer another question, why did Jesus come? And by leading us all the way to the cruel cross of Calvary, Mark tells us that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And so in a nutshell, Mark's gospel seeks to answer two key questions. Maybe it's a key question that you're asking this morning. Who is Jesus and why did Jesus come?

Who is Jesus and why did Jesus come? And you know, I want to say to you that if you're not a Christian this morning, I'd encourage you to read through Mark's gospel. It's the shortest of the four gospels.

So read Mark's gospel because it wants to answer these two key questions. Who is Jesus and why did Jesus come? But the turning point and the pivotal point in Mark's gospel, when the focus changes from the first question, who is Jesus, to the second question, why did Jesus come?

The pivotal point in Mark's gospel is here, in this passage in Mark chapter eight. But it's the pivotal point in the gospel, not just because it's the halfway point in Mark's gospel.

[7 : 14] No, it's the pivotal point in the gospel, because this is the point at which there's clarity, and there's confession, and there's commitment to Jesus Christ.

This passage is the pivotal point in Mark's gospel, because there's clarity, confession, and commitment to Jesus Christ. And what's remarkable is that the conversation in this chapter is not only a pivotal point in Mark's gospel, it's also a pivotal point in Matthew's gospel.

If you remember, only a few weeks ago, we were considering this same conversation from Matthew chapter 16. And both Matthew and Mark, they describe this discussion between Jesus and his disciples as they were walking through the district of Caesarea Philippi.

That's what we read there in verse 27. They went on with his disciples through the villages of Caesarea Philippi. But as they were going on, as they were walking through this district, we read that when it came to the identity of Jesus, the disciples had been listening, and they had been learning from public opinion.

They were listening and learning to what other people, always the other people, what they were saying about the identity of Jesus. And needless to say, when it comes to the identity of Jesus, whether in the first century or even in the 21st century, public opinion was divided.

[8 : 44] Public opinion was completely confused about the identity of Jesus. So Jesus asks his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

And the disciples say, well, everybody's confused. Some say you're John the Baptist. Others say, boys and girls, you're getting this. Others say, you're Elijah. Others say, you're one of the prophets. And by listening and learning from public opinion, the disciples confess that when it comes to the identity of Jesus, when it comes to working out who Jesus is, everybody's completely confused. But, and this is what I love about Jesus. As Jesus talked with his disciples, he conversed with them, he spoke with them. And you know, this is how I often think we should deal with people who are unconverted.

We speak to them, then we probe them. And that's what Jesus does here. He probes and prods the disciples by asking them and turning the whole conversation on its head, by asking them a very pointed and a very personal question.

And he says to them, who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And as I said to you before, this is one of the greatest questions in the gospel.

[10:01] Because this morning, Jesus is probing and prodding you. You're here this morning, or you're online this morning, and it's not by accident.

And Jesus is probing you. He's prodding you by asking you the same pointed and personal question, who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am?

And sadly, far too many people, they're always listening and they're always learning from public opinion. They're listening and learning from what the media and the movies say about Jesus. They're listening and learning from what people in school and what the celebrities say about Jesus. They're listening and learning from what all the fads and fashions of the day have to say about Jesus, that he's this prophet, or he's a good man with a good philosophy of our life, or he's this influential figure from history, or even some would say that he never existed at all.

But you know, my friend, regardless of what public opinion has to say about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only thing that really matters to Jesus is what your opinion is.

[11:16] What is your opinion of this Jesus? That's why Jesus is probing you and prodding you this morning.

He's asking you so pointedly, and even so personally, he's asking you, who do you say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And as we said, this is the pivotal point in Mark's gospel.

Because it's at this pivotal point that Peter steps forward. And Peter steps forward not because he's confused like the crowds were.

Peter has clarity. Peter wants to confess. Peter wants to commit his life to Jesus. And that's what he does. He says there, you are the Christ.

You are the Christ. My friend, it's the pivotal point in the gospel because it's the point at which there's clarity, confession, and commitment to Jesus Christ.

[12:15] Clarity, confession, and commitment to Jesus Christ. But of course, when Peter confesses, you are the Christ, Peter isn't confessing the surname of Jesus.

He's confessing the sovereignty of Jesus. The title Christ, that's his appointed and anointed position. He is Christed.

He has been appointed and anointed as the sovereign and the superior and the one who is supreme over all. He is God's king in God's world. He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But you know, Peter's confession here, where he says, you are the Christ, it's not only a pivotal point in the gospel. You see that it's a pivotal point in Peter's life.

Because while Peter is listening, while Peter is learning, while he's listening and learning to the miracles and the messages of Jesus, he's now discovering, he wants to declare who this Jesus is and what he means to him.

[13:19] You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. But you know, that's about Peter. Jesus wants to know, what about you?

What about you? What about you? My friend, have you come to this pivotal point in your life? So many of you come so close to it, and then you step back from it.

You come close to it, you step back from it. But have you come to this pivotal point in your life where you now think, I need to turn away from my sin and turn to the Savior, Jesus Christ?

Have you come to this pivotal point of clarity and confession and commitment to Jesus Christ?

Because when you come to the clear realization that there's no one else in this world that can save you or deal with your sin apart from Jesus, you know that you need to come to him.

And you need to confess that he is the Christ, the Son of God, the only Savior of sinners, your King of kings, and your Lord of lords. And you know, it's with that confession, you need to commit your life to Jesus Christ by simply living according to your confession.

[14:36] That's what being a Christian is. Commitment is living according to your confession. And yet the sad thing is, and you know me so well, and I know you so well, the sad thing is that so many of you know this already.

You know all this. You know you need to commit your life to Christ. You know you need to confess him as Savior. But you have this stumbling block.

You have no issue with the clarity part. No issue with the clarity part at all because you know that Jesus is the Christ. I'm not telling you anything new. You know that he's the Son of God.

You know that he's the only Savior of sinners. You know that he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And you know that without him, you will spend a lost eternity in hell. You know that. You believe that. You absolutely believe it. And yet there's something in you where you resist it and you refuse to confess Jesus as the Christ and commit your life to him.

[15:42] And you put up all these barriers, all these boundaries, all these walls, and you say, I'm not good enough. I don't know enough. I'm not worthy enough to confess Jesus as Lord or commit my life to him.

But none of us are, my friend. This is the beauty of the gospel. The glory of the gospel is that none of us are good enough.

None of us are worthy enough. None of us know enough. And yet the glory of the gospel is that when you believe in your heart and you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior, you will be saved.

When you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth to someone, someone you know, someone you trust, someone you love, and say to them, I believe Jesus is the Christ.

He's the Son of the living God. He died for my sins. He is my Lord. He is my God. He is my Savior.

[16:55] He is my Shepherd. He is my friend. And when you seek to live according to that confession, the Bible says, you are saved.

You're saved. That's what being a Christian is all about. Clarity, confession, and commitment. Let's not make this difficult.

Let's not make, put up all these stumbling blocks. It's about clarity, confession, and commitment.

But you know, maybe the reason you don't confess and the reason you don't commit, even though you have so much clarity about what Jesus, who Jesus is, and why Jesus came, maybe the reason you don't confess and commit is because you're unwilling to lose in order to live.

Maybe the reason you don't confess and commit your life to Jesus is because you're unwilling to lose in order to live. That's what Jesus emphasizes secondly.

He explains that there's listening and there's learning. Then He says there's losing and there's living. Listening and learning, losing and living. So secondly, losing and living.

[18:09] Losing and living. Look at verse 31. Jesus 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.

And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, Get behind Me, Satan, for you are not set in your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

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.

So when Peter confessed his Christian faith and committed his life to Jesus Christ, the first thing we see is that he's disciplined.

He didn't expect to be disciplined so quickly but he's disciplined. He's disciplined because he's told by Jesus, Get behind Me, Satan. You're not thinking about the things of God. You're thinking about the things of man.

[19:11] But what Peter quickly discovered is that being a disciple is all about listening and learning. Being a disciple of Jesus, it's all about listening and learning.

That's what we've said many times before that the word disciple, it means learner because a disciple is someone who listens and who learns. Which is why Jesus went on to emphasize and explain that being a disciple isn't about getting and gaining.

It's about losing and living. Being a disciple of Jesus isn't about getting and gaining. It's about losing and living. That's why Jesus says in verse 34, verse 35 he says, Whosoever, I love that word, whosoever, whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

And you know, there's so much to unpack from Jesus' statement, but I love that it's addressed to the whosoever. Verse 34 it says, if anyone, whosoever, whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.

And don't you just love that word, whosoever, because it includes everyone, it excludes no one.

Whether male or female, young or old, rich or poor, whosoever, everyone in the community of Barbas and everyone beyond it, whosoever.

[20 : 42] It includes everyone and excludes no one. Which means that as Jesus personally probes us, it includes you. It includes you.

Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. And you know, when Jesus read, when you read Jesus' statement in its original language, when Jesus said this in its original statement, He used three imperatives.

He used three imperatives, three commands where He personally says to us that if you want to be His disciple, this is a must.

This is a non-negotiable. This is an absolute imperative. You must deny yourself. You must take up your cross and you must follow Me.

You must deny self, take up your cross, and follow Me. There are three imperatives, three non-negotiables, three demands of discipleship. Deny self, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.

[21 : 49] And you know, my friend, I want to be honest with you. In 21st century Scotland, okay, bring it more to home. In the Isle of Lewis, in the 21st century, we have it easier than most.

Easier than most to be a Christian. Because in comparison to first century Israel, which at the time belonged to the Roman Empire, or even in comparison to 21st century Iran, one of the most persecuted places to be a Christian today, we have it easier.

So much easier. It's easy to be a Christian. It's easy to confess Jesus as Lord. It's easy to commit your life to Him. Because if you lived in the first century Israel, or 21st century Iran, and you come out on the side of Christ, confessing Him as Lord, and committing your life to Him as Savior, if you did that, you were in effect signing your death warrant.

That's what Jesus meant when He said this. He says, Whosoever, whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

When Jesus mentioned the cross, it's not a metaphor for the struggles of life. He's not saying, oh, you'll have to bear this cross in your life. He's not saying that this is a, it's going to be a symbol of Christianity that you need to wear around your neck as a piece of jewelry.

[23 : 16] No, for Jesus, the cross meant crucifixion. It always meant crucifixion. And everyone hearing Him that day in the district of Caesarea Philippi knew exactly what He meant.

That's why it was such a startling statement. Because in the first century, everyone living under the power and authority of the Roman Empire, they were all ordered to bow the knee and confess, Kaiser Curios, Caesar is Lord.

But if someone refused, if someone refused to confess the Caesar as Lord and instead said, Jesus, Jesus is Lord, they were crucified for their confession.

They were put to death for their commitment to Jesus Christ. And that's why so many of the disciples, you read through the history of the early church, so many of the disciples, they were put to death by crucifixion.

They were crucified because they confessed, Jesus, Jesus is Lord. But this is why Jesus says, if you want to be my disciple, this is a must, this is a non-negotiable, this is an imperative, you must confess.

[24 : 33] You must confess, Jesus, Jesus is Lord. Because whosoever, says Jesus, whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross and follow me.

You know, my friend, Christianity isn't about gaining and getting, it's about losing and living. It's about losing and living. Because as Jesus says, verse 35, whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. And you know, in many ways, that's Jesus' first would you rather question.

He's asking there in verse 35, would you rather save your life or lose it? Would you rather save your life or lose it?

And of course, our natural response is that we would rather save our life than lose it. But when you stop and think about what Jesus is getting at, he's actually highlighting to us that our life, and we know it only too well, our life is momentary.

[25 : 49] It is a vapor, says James. It's a brief moment, fleeting, passing life. And Jesus is showing us that our evanescent life is nothing in comparison to the eternal life that he is offering.

Our fleeting life is nothing in comparison to the eternal life that Jesus is offering. Which is why Jesus asks his second and more solemn, would you rather question?

In verse 36, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

And you know, it's quite a solemn and quite a serious question. Jesus asks us, would you rather gain the whole world and lose your soul? Or would you rather gain salvation and save your soul? And the language Jesus uses here, it's actually fascinating. It's financial language. He's talking about profit and loss. He's using that terminology. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

[27 : 07] It's the language of profit and loss. With the loss being sizably greater than the profit gained. Gaining the whole of this temporary world or losing your soul.

And you know, the thing is, it's such an extreme example that Jesus sets before us because you can't actually gain the whole world. None of us can. We can't gain the whole world. That's the devil's greatest deception that we all seem to fall for.

The temptation of gaining the whole world. The devil deceives us into thinking that we need this. We need to seek it.

We need to strive after it. We need to gain the whole world. And that we'll never find satisfaction.

We'll never be happy. We'll never be safe. We'll never be secure in this life until we have it.

That's why for so many people, the more they have, the more they want. And then they want more and more. I'm sure I've mentioned to you before, John Rockefeller.

[28 : 14] He was, he's said to be one of the richest men of all time. And he was asked by a reporter one day, John, how much is too much? And do you know what he said?

Do you know what he said? Just a little bit more. Just a little bit more. The more you want. The more you have, the more you want.

And sadly for so many people, they seek and strive after satisfaction and security and safety. In all, I've said it to you before, the F's of life. Rico Tice introduced us to the F's of life.

Fun, food, family, finance, friendships, falling in love, fitness, football, and Facebook. All the F's of life. Fun, food, family, finance, friendships, falling in love, fitness, football, and Facebook.

Nothing wrong with any of the F's of life in the rightful and respectful place, but never, says Jesus. Never at the expense of your eternal soul.

[29 : 19] Never at the expense of your eternal soul. Which is why Jesus asks this, would you rather question? Would you rather your precious stuff or your precious soul?

Would you rather be saved or be lost? Would you rather be a Christian friend or an unconverted friend? Would you rather follow the Savior or follow Satan?

Would you rather die in your sin or die with salvation? Would you rather go to heaven, my friend, or go to hell? Would you rather?

It's a simple question, isn't it? Would you rather gain the whole world and lose your soul or gain this salvation through Jesus Christ and save your soul, your eternal, precious soul that the Lord has given to you?

My friend, Jesus asks us a simple question this morning. Would you rather? And he asks the question so simply so that you'll see that earthly gains, they are nothing in comparison to eternal losses.

[30 : 38] He asks the question because it's so obvious. The answer is so obvious that you need to do something about it. And for many of you, is it not about time that you did something about it?

Is it not about time? You did something about it. Today, says the Bible, today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow is the devil's day. Today is God's day. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to come to Christ, confessing him and committing your life to him as saviour and to come, my friend, before you are too late.

Before you are too late, would you rather, would you rather, would you rather gain the whole world and lose your soul or gain salvation and save your soul?

Would you rather? well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for the glory of the gospel.

[32 : 00] We give thanks, Lord, that Jesus speaks to us so personally and that He probes us even when we don't expect it. But He speaks to us so lovingly and so graciously, reminding us that there is the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

O Lord, that Thou wouldest cause us to seek the Lord while He is to be found and to call upon Him while He is near, that we would come to this Jesus, that we would come to Him with clarity, we would come to Him confessing that He is Lord and committing our life to Him as saviour.

O Lord, forgive us, we pray, for the times where we waste, we waste our opportunities. But Lord, that we would see that now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. Bless Thy truth to us, Lord, we pray, that we would not leave it in the pew, but that we would take it with us, that it might find lodgment in our heart and bring forth fruit to Thy glory. Bless us together, Lord, we pray, go before us, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing in conclusion the words of Psalm 130. [33 : 19] Psalm 130, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 421. It's in the blue psalm book, page 421, in the Scottish Psalter version, and we're going to sing the whole psalm.

Psalm 130. But before we sing, I've got a few questions. Are you ready, boys and girls? Ever ready. Question one. Who did people say Jesus is? Well done. John the Baptist, and Elijah. So they didn't say he was Joseph. What did Peter confess about Jesus? You are the Christ. Well done. What question is Jesus asking? Would you rather? Right, Finley? Would you rather? What does this Bible passage teach us about our soul? It's precious. [34 : 29] It's a precious soul. Do you remember the headings? Well done. Listening and learning, losing and living.

Well done. Hope the adults all got that too. So Psalm 130, in conclusion, we're singing from the beginning, we're singing the whole psalm. Just a reminder, there's tea and coffee after the service, so please do stay behind if you can.

It's just in the church hall to your right as you leave. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried. My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stand if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be. And as we said, all our Psalms focus upon the theme of the soul.

Verse 5, I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in his word, more than they that for morning watch, my soul waits for the Lord.

[35 : 31] And that word wait doesn't mean hang about, it means trust. It doesn't mean I'll wait till tomorrow, it means I'm trusting him now.

My soul waits, it trusts in the Lord. So we're singing Psalm 130, the whole Psalm. We'll stand to sing if you're able, to God's praise. Lord, from the depths to thee I cry.

My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stop if thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity.

But yet with thee forgiveness is the fear thou mayest be.

[37 : 09] I wait I wait for God my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than may that for for morning watch my soul wait for the Lord.

I say more than they that do watch the morning light to see.

Let Israel open the Lord Lord for with him mercy be.

and plenty of redemption is ever found within with him and from all his iniquities Israel shall redeem. the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore.

[39 : 18] Amen.