

The Christian's Secret **Mark 8:27-35**

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every body here know what a secret is? A secret is something you know, something nobody else knows, something you don't tell. Not only does everybody know what a secret is, I think everybody here has at least one secret, something you know, something nobody else knows, something you're not going to tell.

Don't worry! I'm not going to go down the row asking each of you to tell me your secret. Because this morning I've Got a Secret, actually a series of secrets about you, the believer, and Jesus your Savior. And I'm going to tell...I'm going to tell all of them...not only to remind YOU of the secrets, but also because these are things that are UNKNOWN to the UNBELIEVER. That's why I call them secret. But, in the same regard, they are things unbelievers need to know.

In the first verses of our text, Jesus is speaking to the twelve disciples alone. This is a private matter, something they need to understand. You can listen in on this private conversation because, by faith, you too are included in the group known as Jesus' disciples. You and I believe what the twelve disciples here confessed for the first time about Jesus.

²⁹ *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."* You are the Christ, that is the Messiah, the subject of Old Testament prophecy, the fulfillment of that promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (as we saw in our first lesson today). Matthew's account of this incident includes Peter's exclamation, *"You are the Son of the Living God"* (Matthew 16:16)

These disciples had been with Jesus for almost two years. They had heard him teach about the Kingdom of God. They were there when he applied Old Testament scriptures about the Messiah to himself. They had observed his mighty miracles. They had listened when he spoke about himself. And now it seems like they "got it." It sounds like they finally understood what Jesus had been saying!...and then, verse 30, *Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.* "Whew, it's about time you guys got it right, now, don't tell anybody else...this is our little secret."

WHAT? *Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.* Why did Jesus say that? Why didn't he want them to tell? Well the answer is twofold. First, the people were not ready, at this time, to hear that Jesus was the Messiah. They had too many false ideas about the promised Messiah. They expected him to be an earthly king who would free them from the Romans and establish a glorious earthly kingdom. The second reason for this secret is the disciples themselves. They weren't ready to spread this message because they themselves still shared too many of the current, erroneous ideas about the person and work of the Messiah, as you will see shortly.

But at least, by this time they could say, "We believe you are the Christ. We believe you are the Son of the living God." It is only after this confession that Jesus began to teach them another surprising secret. ³¹ *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by*

the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. ³² *He spoke plainly about this...*

Jesus spoke plainly because the disciples were going to have great difficulty accepting these facts. The idea of a Messiah who would be a suffering servant wasn't easy to swallow. But it wasn't really a secret. Old Testament prophets like Isaiah had painted a vivid picture of the Messiah who would be *"despised & rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering ...oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth...led like a lamb to the slaughter..."*(Isaiah 53:3, 7).

Remember, the disciples had been taught all their lives to look for a powerful, political Messiah. Even though they could confess, "You are the Messiah!" they were conditioned to think that Messiah would restore Israel's independence and prosperity through a revolutionary war against Israel's oppressors. Oh sure, some people, maybe a lot of people would die in support of efforts to overthrow the empire. But the Messiah, the leader couldn't die if he hoped to do any good for the people.

³² *He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* Here's why Peter began to rebuke Jesus. "It's common sense, Jesus, you can only get to the top by defeating your enemies! The Messiah's got to be a winner. You can do MIRACLES! So don't let this thought of defeat, this thought of dying, cause you to give up now! You're the hope of our nation!" ³³ *But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."* It's no wonder Jesus called Peter "Satan." What Peter was suggesting was exactly OPPOSITE of what HAD to happen.

And so, from this point on in his ministry, Jesus began to teach his disciples the Not-So-Secret secret that God brings his desired intentions to pass in ways that are exactly opposite of the world's ways. Christ Jesus had to go through a seeming DEFEAT to win the VICTORY. Christ Jesus had to go through total self-denial, total self-sacrifice to repair the breach between God and us that was caused by sin.

Without realizing it, when Peter said, "No Lord! Don't let yourself be arrested and killed," he was suggesting and arguing for a course of action that would cut himself off from the ultimate good Jesus wanted to do for him and for us. He was trying to keep Jesus from accomplishing God's plan of salvation...God's plan to save Peter and all the other believers.

Although you and I are disciples of Jesus, our position is different from the twelve when it comes to Jesus' suffering and dying. You know what the Old Testament prophets predicted, what Jesus himself predicted came true in horrible reality. He did suffer many things and he was killed. But you know what the suffering and death of Jesus accomplished. It paid the price for your sins, my sins, all sins, paid it completely. So we don't protest against Jesus' suffering and dying. On the contrary, we hold it as the heart of our Christian faith.

Unbelievers don't know this...it's a secret to them. They think, by and large, that Christianity is like all the other religions in the world, namely, that if you lead a good life here on earth, you can earn an afterlife in heaven. If they know the name Jesus, they probably think of him as the teacher who showed us how to live our lives in such a way as to make it into heaven. They don't know and they need to be told the secret that it's not what you DO in this life that gets you to heaven, it's what Jesus

has already DONE. Faith in Jesus and faith in his work assures you of heaven. And even that faith is not something YOU do, it's something the Holy Spirit works in you.

Jesus not only spoke of his death, from this point on in his ministry, he also spoke about his resurrection. Jesus' resurrection from the grave not only assures you that your sins are paid for "in full," but also gives you solid evidence that you, too, have life after death. The personal thing, the secret thing, that goes on between Jesus and every believer centers first on his dying and rising for you and then on your dying and rising with him. You see, through your baptism, you are connected with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Romans 6:3-5 says, "*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*"

Unbelievers don't know about this. It a secret from them. Not only does Jesus' death pay for all your sins, but when you come to faith, you die to sin, that is, you aren't ruled by sin any more. You are free from sin's complete control. You die to sin and you rise to live, not for yourself, but for Christ. I'm talking here about the Christian life. A life lived for Christ. Now you know as well as I do that your Christian life is not a life of effortless, easy self-improvement. It is a constant process of daily dying to sin and daily rising to a new life, empowered by the Gospel and motivated by God's love. *For Christ's love compels us...he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Unbelievers think you're trying to live a good life in order to please God and earn heaven. They don't know that you live in a state of "forgiveness." And they don't know your Christian life, your obedience to God's will, is a way you show gratitude and thankfulness to God. Whenever Christians act on impulse or with selfishness according to the world's value system, Jesus responds as he responded to Peter. He rebukes us in his word with his law. That response is part of his caring for believers, his ministry to his disciples. It is motivated out of his love.

But there is something about Christ and Christians that the world can understand. That's what Jesus is explaining when, in verses 34 and 35 he includes "the crowd." ³⁴ *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.* Jesus describes three unique things that mark his disciples and that give glory to God: To Deny Yourself, To Take Up The Cross, and To Lose Your Life.

To Deny Yourself is to try every day not to let selfishness control you in your relationship with God and in your relationships with others. This is very hard to do because we are basically very selfish creatures, looking out for ourselves, doing what's best for number one. To deny yourself means placing the interests of God's kingdom and the interests of others ahead of your own interests. To deny yourself means not hiding behind the excuse, "I'm just that way. I'm too shy. I'm not a people person. That's how God made me." To deny yourself means stepping out of your comfort zone every once in a while. As long as you are hesitant to forgive, unwilling to help someone in need, unfriendly to the outsider, stingy with your worldly possessions, unloving, you're not denying yourself, you're

defaulting to that natural selfish nature. It's hard to truly deny yourself. In fact it's only possible when you are empowered by the Gospel and motivated by God's love.

Secondly Jesus says, "My disciples take up the cross." **To Take Up The Cross** is to suffer for the sake of your faith. In today's post-Christian world it's easy to face ridicule just for having a standard of right and wrong. You want to face contempt and derision? Just let it be known that you believe that ALL of the Bible is God's Word and that ALL of the Bible is true. If you are a witness for Christ, you can expect opposition. In a society that touts respect and toleration for ALL religions, the exception is Christianity. Christians and our beliefs are fair game. We are depicted as the villain or the buffoon, the source of the problem, the one who must change or be done away with. In fact, if you haven't been ridiculed, if people haven't made fun of you, if you haven't been called old-fashioned or out of step because of your stand on issues such as abortion or gay marriage, maybe you're not witnessing your faith. Maybe you're not evidencing yourself as a follower of Christ who takes up the cross.

Finally, a disciple of Christ is someone who is ready **To Lose His Life**. This seems kind of extreme, but in a very literal sense it is happening all over the world in 2009. Your brothers and sisters in Christ are losing their lives for Christ and for the Gospel in China, and Indonesia, in Saudi Arabia and Iran, in Egypt and in sub-Sahara Africa, and in countless other places. Pray for them. Pray that governmental persecution and programs of extermination by opposing religious leaders are stopped. Pray that anti-Christian hatred is extinguished. But remember, a disciple of Christ is someone who is ready to lose his life.

Those who go through this life seeking all this world's pleasures, those who are only concerned about themselves and their career and their bank accounts and their toys, and never give a thought to things that are spiritual, they may take all the world has to offer but lose their souls to hell. (And hell is forever.) To lose your life is to focus on things spiritual, not on things material. To lose your life is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. To lose your life is to use your talents and your wealth and your time to work for the advancement of God's kingdom.

There are things that you can do, things that you can say every day that will give evidence of your faith in Jesus. I've got to tell you that your joy will increase as you continue to be more and more a part of letting God's secret out. God wants the whole world to know his plan of love and mercy, his plan of salvation. You've got a secret and God wants you to tell it.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

What a mystery it is that you have so loved us undeserving sinners to the point that you sent your Son to live for us and to die for us. Use us to unveil these secrets to others, that they may believe and share with us the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.