

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: LOSING ONE’S LIFE FOR JESUS’ SAKE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus masterfully worked with the original twelve disciples, calling them from their rather mundane way of life to transform them into fearless leaders who would lay the foundation of the church in the first century. He knew when to encourage them, when to instruct them, and even when to rebuke and correct them. He was the master teacher, while they were the ever wayward students in his classroom of faith. Perhaps Peter more than any other student of the class was most apt to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Peter’s rebuke of the Lord Jesus as recorded in Mark 8:32 is the supreme *faux pas* of his preparatory training with Jesus.

Peter’s off-target rebuke of his master was countered by one of Jesus’ strongest challenges to discipleship: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”¹ The one who wants to be Jesus’ disciple must “lose his life” for Jesus’ sake, if he wants to save it. That the statements of Jesus found in this passage are challenging, no one denies. The greater difficulty is understanding how these statements relate to personal salvation and the eternal state. As one turns to Christian commentators, he quickly finds that a great many assume that *eternal life* is the issue, that is, the person Jesus has in mind is in danger of losing out on eternal life and will thus face an eternity in hell. In this paper, I will evaluate that suggestion in light of the context and conclude that Jesus had a much different thought in mind.

II. THE SETTING FOR THE STORY

The account of Peter’s rebuke and Jesus’ counter-challenge is found in all three Synoptic Gospels: Matt 16:21–28, Mark 8:31–9:1, and Luke 9:22–27. Of the three, Luke’s account is the shortest—he actually omits Peter’s rebuke altogether, choosing to focus on Jesus’ announcement of his coming suffering and the challenge for his disciples to also be prepared to suffer. There are other differences in the details each has chosen to record, and thus it is essential to study all three to properly interpret Jesus’ instruction and demands. We should also observe the placement of this story in the overall earthly ministry of Jesus. Up to this point, Jesus’ ministry had been centered on the Galilee region, but beginning with Mark 8:31 he began to shift his attention to Jerusalem where he had to go for his destiny of the cross. Mark arranged the material in his Gospel account so as to provide a

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¹ Scripture quotations used in this article are taken from the NASB.

narrative record in 8:31–10:52 of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to suffer death. By the point of Mark 11:1, Jesus has triumphantly entered into Jerusalem for the last week of his earthly life. Mark's account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is also punctuated by three separate predictions by Jesus of his coming death and resurrection (8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Thus Jesus' teaching on the cost of discipleship falls precisely at a major turning point in his earthly life. Though Jesus will still minister in the Galilee area, more attention will be given to preparing the disciples for what they will encounter at Jerusalem. Knowing that the suffering of the cross awaited him, Jesus ramps up the demands of discipleship for those who follow him.

Prior to this point in his ministry, Jesus concentrated on training the twelve and presenting his messianic credentials for the nation to observe. The Jewish people—and the twelve—observed his many miracles and heard his teachings. The pericope in Mark 8:31–9:1 regarding the cost of discipleship follows on the heels of the two great public miracles of the feeding of the 4,000 and the 5,000, and thus the disciples ought to have understood his divine nature by this point. Yet the subsequent account of the discussion of bread while in the boat (Mark 8:13–21) reveals they were far from having learned all their lessons. Jesus scolded them, “Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?” (8:17), and again in 8:21, “Do you not yet understand?” What follows, then, is a trip northward from the Sea of Galilee into the region of Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27). In all three Synoptic accounts, the pericope regarding the cost of discipleship is immediately preceded by Jesus' question regarding who people were saying he was (Matt 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–22). At this critical moment, Peter answers “You are the Christ,” and Matthew's account adds, “the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16; Mark 8:29). Although Peter answered correctly (Jesus commended him), the disciples were far from understanding who their Messiah was and what his true mission was, for they did not yet understand his coming suffering. His questioning them about his identity seems preparatory for the revelation he was about to make concerning his rejection, death, and resurrection. This is confirmed by the way Matthew introduced the discipleship passage: “*From that time* Jesus began to show His disciples . . .” (Matt 16:21).

Prior to this point in his ministry, Jesus had not made such a frank disclosure about his death and resurrection. True, he had made a veiled reference to his death when he declared, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again” (John 2:19; cf. Mark 14:58), but not much more had been said other than cryptic hints such as we find in Matt 9:15 and 12:40. (That this was a distinctive change in Jesus' teaching seems confirmed by the words Mark added after the announcement that he would be killed: “And He was stating the matter plainly” [8:32].) Jesus had taught them about facing persecution (e.g. Matt 5:10–12; 10:16–31), but it seems the topic of martyrdom had only been cursorily addressed—despite the disciples' knowledge of the martyrdom of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29).

III. JESUS' SUFFERING FORETOLD AND PETER'S REBUKE (MARK 8:31–33; CF. MATT 16:21–23; LUKE 9:22)

Following Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus "warned them to tell no one about Him" (Mark 8:30). Apparently he was not ready for them to broadcast that he was the Messiah. This could be due to their still having much to learn about his messianic identity or to their need to understand more about his true mission (e.g. how his sufferings would bring fulfillment of the kingdom promises). Jesus had other things in mind for them at this time, namely, to come to grips with the fact that he, as Messiah, would actually die: "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" (Mark 8:31). Obviously the disciples comprehended the thought of his being killed, since it was on the basis of this that Peter confronted Jesus. However, they did not comprehend the full-orbed message of what he had just said, particularly the resurrection (cf. Mark 9:32; 16:11–14; John 20:9). France writes, "Perhaps we are to assume (and 9:10 suggests this) that the idea was so totally foreign to their thinking that they could not absorb its meaning, and perhaps imagined that Jesus was using some sort of metaphorical imagery for ultimate vindication (though the very specific *μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας* would not sit comfortably with such a sense)."² His rejection, on the other hand, was more understandable in that there had been plenty of occasions in which Jesus had been in confrontation with the religious leadership of the nation. So the announcement of their rejection of him would not have been so surprising. Together, the elders, chief priests, and scribes represented the Jewish Sanhedrin—the official religious body of the nation.³ Though there had been rejection of Jesus all along by the religious leaders, what Jesus apparently referred to was an official legal rejection of him as Messiah that was to come about upon his final entry into Jerusalem when he was tried before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53–65).⁴ At that time, they charged Jesus with blasphemy, and "they all condemned Him to be deserving of death" (Mark 14:64).

What Peter heard (to the exclusion of everything else) were the words "be killed," and that simply did not fit his theology for Israel's Messiah. Peter—as did the other disciples—anticipated a Messiah who would first liberate them from Roman rule and then take up his role as king to bring in the kingdom prophesied in the OT (cf. Luke 19:11). God had a grander scheme for the world which Peter at

² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark; A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 336.

³ The Sanhedrin was composed of members from both the Sadducees and the Pharisees, though the chief priests belonged to the sect of the Sadducees. In Jesus' day, the chief priests included Caiaphas (who ruled from AD 18 to 36) and his father-in-law Annas (who ruled from AD 6 to 15). Caiaphas's successors were Jonathan and his brother Theophilus (Acts 4:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.26, 95, 123), and the latter two may also have been numbered among the "chief priests."

⁴ Jesus' choice of words "and be rejected" (*ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι*, aor. pass. of *ἀποδοκίμαζω*) may be a deliberate allusion to the messianic prophecy in Ps 118:22 [LXX 117:22]: "The stone which the builders rejected (*ἀπεδοκίμασαν*, aor. act. of *ἀποδοκίμαζω*) has become the chief corner stone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes."

this time did not understand. Messiah would be king, but first he had to die for the sins of all mankind to make redemption possible.⁵ Peter, as he so often did, acted on impulse. “And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him” (Mark 8:32). Matthew alone provides the words Peter uttered: “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt 16:22). In saying this, Peter took the role of “big brother,” as though he knew better than Jesus what was in his best interest.

Mark introduced Jesus’ response to being rebuked by Peter with the words, “But turning around and seeing his disciples” (8:33). What Peter had done in rebuking Jesus would need to be countered, presumably for all the twelve to hear. Mark continued, “He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s’” (8:33). Matthew included the additional words, “You are a stumbling block to Me” (16:23). To be addressed as “Satan” must have unnerved Peter. The term itself was a Hebrew word (שָׂטָן) meaning “adversary,” though commonly used as a title for the devil. What Peter was doing (though he certainly did not realize it at the time) was acting as an adversary to the Father’s will for Jesus. His mind was not set on God’s interests, but man’s. That is, Peter was doing what seemed humanly appropriate, but what seemed logical in human reasoning was diametrically opposed to the will of God.

IV. JESUS DEFINES THE TERMS OF DISCIPLESHIP (MARK 8:34–9:1; CF. MATT 16:24–28; LUKE 9:23–27)

Following the rebuke of Peter, the Lord Jesus had more he wished to say, but for this he chose to expand the audience to include “the crowd” (Mark 8:34). Only Mark makes this specific, as Matthew simply has “Jesus said to his disciples,” and Luke “He was saying to *them* all.” Even though more people were allowed to hear, the focus was still on the disciples. This may be why Matthew only makes mention of the disciples. In any case, we should not draw the conclusion from this that what Jesus is about to say is intended to teach non-believers how to be saved from their sins. We must keep in mind that what Jesus says in Mark 8:34–9:1 was prompted by what Peter (the believer!) had said. Therefore this is primarily “family talk,” aimed at correcting the faulty attitude of Peter. Jesus is defining the terms of discipleship (what it means for a believer to follow him), not giving instruction on how to become a believer.

1. *The call for total commitment* (Mark 8:34; cf. Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). The Lord Jesus totally rejected Peter’s idea that he should abandon the notion of being killed. Instead Jesus laid out what he expected from his disciples who wanted to “follow Him.” Rejection and suffering were not limited to him, and thus he warned those who followed him to be prepared for suffering. He said, “If anyone wishes to come

⁵ The idea of a suffering Messiah was certainly embedded in the OT, obscure though it was. France writes, “Zc. 9–14 contains the recurring theme of an apparently messianic figure who is rejected by his people, pierced and smitten (Zc. 11:4–14; 12:10–14; 13:7–9; cf. Mark 14:27); and most obviously Is. 53 speaks of a servant of God who suffers and dies and whose fate is in some way linked to the restoration of his people” (*Gospel of Mark* 334). To these passages could be added Psalms 22 and 69, where the theme of the suffering and death of God’s faithful servant is also found.

after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” The word “come” in the first part of this sentence is the Greek word ἀκολουθέω which is often rendered “follow.” Mark’s Gospel had started with Jesus calling certain ones to follow him, and it interesting to study this word throughout the book.⁶ Not only had the twelve *followed* him, but so had many others from both Judea and Galilee. Now Jesus makes it very clear what he was expecting from those who followed him.

The first thing Jesus expected was a change of attitude: “he must deny himself.” The word “deny” (ἀπαρνέομαι) has two basic meanings.⁷ The first is “to refuse to recognize or acknowledge” someone. This is what Peter would later do in regard to Christ: he would deny knowing Jesus (Matt 26:34, 35, 75). The second meaning is “to act in a wholly selfless manner” (deny oneself), and this is the nuance that the word has in Mark 8:34. When Jesus called his followers to “deny self,” he was essentially challenging them to set aside their agenda—what they thought should be done or should happen—and to get on God’s agenda.⁸ Timothy Keller offers this pastoral counsel: “If your agenda is the end, then Jesus is just the means; you’re using him. But if Jesus is the King, you cannot make him a means to your end. You can’t come to a king negotiating. You lay your sword at a king’s feet and say, ‘Command me.’ If you try to negotiate instead, if you say, ‘I’ll obey you if ...,’ you aren’t recognizing him as king.”⁹

Peter thought Jesus should not be killed, but that was not God’s agenda. Denying self, then, means to submit one’s human thoughts to God’s thoughts ... to his will, his plan, and his purposes. To “deny self” does not mean that you deny yourself the right to have any fun in life or that you deny yourself certain pleasures of life. Rather you submit to what God wants you to think and to do. You exchange *your will* for his *will*. This obviously means we must learn what the will of God is, and this comes about primarily through reading and applying the written Word of God to our lives. As Rom 12:1–2 instructs us, we are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed through the renewing of our minds. With this clarification of denying self in mind, there is no reason to think (especially in this context) that Jesus’ call to deny one’s self is an essential step toward salvation from sin and hence justification.¹⁰

⁶ See Mark 1:18; 2:14, 15; 3:7; 5:24; 6:1.

⁷ BDAG 97.

⁸ France explains the denying of self in this way: “The reflexive use implies perhaps to refuse to be guided by one’s own interests, to surrender control of one’s own destiny” (*Gospel of Mark* 340).

⁹ Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross* (New York: Dutton, 2011) 106–7.

¹⁰ Bock seems to cloud the distinction between saving faith and commitment to discipleship when he states, “The essence of saving trust in God is self-denial, a recognition that he must save because disciples cannot save themselves, that life must be given over into God’s care and protection.... Salvation does not come on one’s terms or on one’s own merits (Rom. 3–5). Jesus calls this self-denial” (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994] 852). One problem with trying to force “denying self” as part of a definition of saving faith is that to be consistent we should also include the willingness to be martyred, but most theologians would probably not go that far (lest salvation by grace through faith give way to a system of “works”). This is not to deny, however, that when a sinner comes to God for salvation from sin he must come in humility and with the recognition that he needs a

The second thing Jesus expected of his followers was a willingness to suffer, even to the point of martyrdom: to “take up his cross and follow” him. In the Roman world of the first century, it was not uncommon for a condemned person to be crucified on a cross. In fact, he would even be forced to carry his own cross (or at least the cross-beam) out to the place where he would be executed. Thus to see a person carrying a cross meant that he was as good as dead. Edwards describes the ignominy of the cross image:

An image of extreme repugnance, the cross was an instrument of cruelty, pain, dehumanization, and shame. The cross symbolized hated Roman oppression and was reserved for the lowest social classes. It was the most visible and omnipresent aspect of Rome’s terror apparatus, designed especially to punish criminals and quash slave rebellions. In 71 B.C. the Roman general Crassus defeated the slave-rebel Spartacus and crucified him and six thousand of his followers on the Appian Way between Rome and Capua. A century later in Mark’s day, Nero would crucify and burn Christians who were falsely accused of setting fire to Rome.¹¹

Obviously Jesus was not instructing his followers to go out and carry literal crosses; rather he used this imagery to make a point. They were to consider themselves prepared to suffer to the point of death, or as Ladd succinctly put it, “To take up one’s cross means to be willing to go as Jesus went to a martyr’s death.”¹² But this would also include the shame that might come with identifying oneself with Jesus. Bock explains, “The image calls for one to accept rejection, using the picture of the shame that came with carrying the cross to one’s death. It is subjecting oneself to ‘the howling, hostile mob.’ One is subject to insult and ridicule before the world for thinking, acting, and living differently.”¹³

Luke adds an important detail not found in the other accounts. Every follower must “take up his cross *daily* and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). The stipulation that this cross-bearing must be done daily clarifies that Jesus is not talking about how one is “born again” (regenerated) or justified before God (in the Pauline sense of forensic justification). Regeneration is a one-time transaction, whereby a guilty sinner places his faith in the atoning work of Christ as his sin-substitute, in order to receive eternal forgiveness and eternal life. Scripture never portrays that as a *repeated act*. In contrast, cross-bearing is a daily commitment one makes.

In Mark 8:34, Jesus’ statement challenging followers to total commitment contains three imperatival verbs: deny, take up, and follow. In the Greek text, the first two are in the aorist tense, while the third one (“follow”) is in the present tense. The shift from aorist tense to present tense seems to be deliberate. Bock concludes,

savior. My point is simply that the call for self-denial *in this context* is not for salvation from the penalty of sin but rather for a believer to humbly submit to God’s will in preference to his own human reasoning.

¹¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 256. For references to the extensiveness of Roman crucifixion in first-century Palestine, see Josephus, *Ant.* 13.14.2 §380; and 17.10.10 §295.

¹² George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 202.

¹³ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 233.

“Self-denial and taking up the cross are fundamental commitments, while following is a continual activity.”¹⁴

Although the idea of bearing one’s cross signifies first and foremost the willingness to ultimately die for Christ, it would also include (by way of application) a total claim upon the disciple’s allegiance and the relinquishment of all his resources for the cause of Christ. Nothing less than a total surrender of one’s self will do.

2. *The rationale for the commitment demanded* (Mark 8:35–37; cf. Matt 16:25–26; Luke 9:24–25). Jesus’ call for his followers to make a total commitment to him was an exceptionally strong demand. Had they fully comprehended who this was that was speaking to them (Jesus was not only Messiah but the Creator God), they should have had no problem obeying his call to deny self and take up their cross (being prepared to die for him). But such a full comprehension of his divine nature had probably not yet been grasped by most in his day.

Peter, as did the rest of the twelve, needed to understand the commitment Jesus was looking for. Yet the same applied to all other followers, which explains why Jesus called others to hear what he had to say. Some of those in the crowd, however, might not yet be prepared to make such a total commitment, and so Jesus addressed this issue. Jesus’ tactic to address those who lacked such commitment was to lay out the alternative for their consideration. He did this by making four profound statements that challenged the listeners to consider the costliness of their response to him.

The Greek word γάρ, translated “for,” appears at the beginning of each of the four verses in Mark 8:35–38. This is best understood as an “explanatory *gar*,” meaning that with each statement Jesus is *explaining* why he has demanded total allegiance from those who would follow him and why this is the appropriate response they should make (v. 34). Each of these “*gar* statements” are related, in that they function together to provide a full-orbed rationale for Jesus’ call to total commitment.

a. *Rationale 1: Saving one’s life now to lose it later is foolish* (Mark 8:35). If one is not going to be totally committed to him, then that person is basically making a choice to be committed to self. That is, he will protect his life from whatever might threaten him and make no risks for the sake of Jesus. So Jesus said, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). The use of the word “save” (σώζω) in this verse has prompted some to automatically assume that Jesus was talking about being saved from the penalty of sin. Yet a closer study reveals that this is *not* what Jesus meant. First, although the word σώζω in certain contexts can have the meaning of being saved from the penalty of one’s sin (e.g. Titus 3:5–6), a closer study of this term in the NT quickly reveals that it can have other connotations.¹⁵ The standard Greek NT lexicon gives the following for the first meaning (a non-soteriological one) that

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For a more thorough study of the lexical flexibility of the term σώζω, see chapter 12 in Joseph C. Dillow, “Our Great Salvation,” in *Final Destiny: The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Monument, CO: Panyim Group, 2012).

σώζω can have: “to preserve or rescue fr. natural dangers and afflictions, *save, keep from harm, preserve, rescue*.”¹⁶ So we have to seek a meaning that is most appropriate to the context in which the word occurs. Second, we should keep in mind that Jesus was speaking primarily to Peter and the others of the twelve. With the exception of Judas (who betrayed the Lord), these disciples were already saved from the penalty of sin. Just moments earlier Peter had made the confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Third, a parallel statement found in Matt 10:39 uses the word “find” rather than “save”: “He who has *found* his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”¹⁷ This indicates that the nuance of *salvation from the penalty of sin* is not what Jesus fundamentally had in mind, as Jesus’ point is not reliant upon the word σώζω. Fourth, the meaning of σώζω in this particular case must be understood in light of the concept “to save one’s life.”¹⁸ This phrase is found seven times in the NT (Matt 16:25; Mark 3:4; 8:35; Luke 6:9; 9:24; Jas 1:21; 5:20; cf. John 12:27), and carries the meaning “to keep physically alive” (the opposite of being put to death). Observe the combination of *save* and *life* (σώζω and ψυχή) in Mark 3:4 when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand: “And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to *save a life* or to kill?” But they kept silent.” Obviously Jesus was not talking about eternal salvation from the penalty of sin but about rescuing one from physical death.

The idea that “wishing to save one’s life” means to protect it from death makes perfect sense in this context. Jesus had stated in Mark 8:31 that he would be killed, and Peter objected to this idea. Peter was driven by the notion that Jesus should not give up his life. France concurs,

The immediate subject of these verses, following as they do the imagery of taking up one’s cross in v. 34, is surely the literal loss of (earthly) life which the disciple is called to accept as a potential result of following Jesus. Only that sense fully does justice to the wordplay. To extend this sense to the loss of privilege, advantage, reputation, comfort, and the like may be legitimate in principle, but only so long as this primary and more radical sense is not set aside.¹⁹

Jesus now takes that philosophy (that the cause of Christ and the gospel is not worth dying for) and reveals where it will lead a person. Where will this philosophy get one’s life? Jesus says that this person “will lose it.” The word “lose” is the Greek word ἀπόλλομι, which basically means “to ruin or destroy.”²⁰ The believer who fails to heed Jesus’ call to total commitment by being willing to suffer to the

¹⁶ BDAG 982.

¹⁷ Cf. Luke 17:33 where “keep” is used in the sense of *preserving one’s life*: “Whoever seeks to *keep* his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it.”

¹⁸ The word “life” in Mark 8:35 is the Greek word ψυχή, which fundamentally means “soul.” However, it commonly stands for the whole “life” of a person (see BDAG 1099).

¹⁹ France, *Gospel of Mark* 340. Cf. France, *Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 636.

²⁰ BDAG 115.

point of death for Christ (and bear whatever indignation might come with following Christ) stands to “lose.” The outcome for him will be “ruin.”

This notion that one will *lose his life* is precisely where the theology gets garbled. So many commentators have unfortunately assumed that what one loses is the most important possession of all, “eternal life.”²¹ For the Arminian, this would mean losing one’s salvation, while for others this would mean that one loses life in the sense of failing to obtain “eternal life.”²² Grassmick, for instance, writes,

Paradoxically a person who wants to save (from *σῶζω*, “preserve”) his life (*ψυχὴν*, “soul, life”) will lose it; he will not be saved to eternal life. But a person who loses (lit., “will lose”) his life (*ψυχή*) for the sake of Jesus and the gospel (cf. 1:1) will save (from *σῶζω*, “preserve”) it; he will be saved to eternal life (cf. comments on 10:26–27; 13:13)... One who decides to maintain a self-centered life in this world by refusing Jesus’ requirements (Mark 8:34) will ultimately lose his life to eternal ruin.²³

Bock also assumes that eternal life is what is at stake: “One’s real, eternal life is too high a price to pay for temporary earthly acceptance.”²⁴ Yet the text does *not* say that the one who wishes to save his life will *lose eternal life*. Rather, he will lose “it,” that is, his life. The Greek word for “lose” (ἀπόλλυμι) has various nuances of meaning. In some contexts, it can mean to literally be put to death physically (Matt 12:14; 27:20), or to be in a state of dying (Luke 8:24). It can also mean to go to a state of “ruin,” as wineskins being ruined (Matt 9:17). Indeed, it can have “eternal death” in view (Matt 10:28; John 10:28; 1 Cor 1:18), but in those cases, rejection of Christ is the cause ... not one’s unwillingness to die for Christ. Finally, it can have the sense of losing a reward (Matt 10:42; Mark 9:41) or losing out on a full reward (2 John 8).

So, what kind of “losing” does the context of Mark 8 suggest? While nothing is explicitly said about losing eternal life (and thus being consigned to hell), the

²¹ Edwards is an example of those who conclude that what is lost is eternal life when he writes, “To lose one’s life is to lose physical existence, but to lose one’s soul has eternal consequences... the one whose existence is more important than Jesus will lose both Jesus and his existence” (*Gospel according to Mark* 257). Lane concurs, “When a man has forfeited eternal life, he experiences absolute loss, even though he may have won the approval of the whole world with his denial of Jesus and the gospel” (William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 309). Neufeld writes, “[O]nly now, after learning that Jesus will die and rise, can Mark’s reader understand that one receives eternal life by imitating Jesus’ death” (Edmund K. Neufeld, “The Gospel in the Gospels: Answering the Question ‘What Must I do to be Saved?’ From the Synoptics,” *JETS* 51 [2008] 266–96). Similarly, Bock states, “If one wishes to save one’s life through the world’s acceptance, it will be lost because of a refusal to come to a rejected Jesus, who nevertheless does save” (*Luke 1:1–9:50* 854). That Bock understands “save” in the sense of eternal salvation from sins is clear by what he subsequently says, “In turning to God for the forgiveness of sins, one recognizes that one is not to live life as in the past and that one cannot approach God on human terms. Rather, one is to live in light of God’s offer of forgiveness and life” (p. 855). Yet Jesus has said nothing about forgiveness of sins in this passage, and to inject that into the interpretation is unwarranted.

²² The latter position is the general view of those who advocate what has come to be known as “lordship salvation.”

²³ John Grassmick, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* (ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; Wheaton: SP Publications, 1983) 141.

²⁴ Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture* 233.

context admittedly has judgment in view (note Mark 8:38). Yet before we conclude that final judgment is meant, we should consider that Jesus could just as well have had in mind “the judgment seat of Christ,” a judgment for believers.²⁵ In light of other passages on this subject, the judgment seat of Christ will be a time for each believer to give an account of his life on earth and to be evaluated by the Lord (Rom 14:10–12; 2 Cor 5:9–10). This will include having one’s works analyzed for the purpose of determining how one will be rewarded. First Corinthians 3:12–15 describes this evaluation of our works:

¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. ¹⁴If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

If Mark 8:38 alludes to the judgment seat of Christ (support to follow), then this leads to the conclusion that one loses his life in the sense that he will “end up losing out” when he eventually has to stand before his Lord and have his life evaluated. What will he have to show at that time for the life that he has “saved” (i.e. so carefully protected and kept for self)? He may have steered clear of suffering for Christ (and certainly martyrdom), but what will this have gained him in the long run? He will not be better off by this course of life. Rather, he will be worse off. That which he “saved,” he only saved for the very short-lived present life. The “ruin” he has to live with as a result, he will have to live with for all eternity.

The converse, however, is equally true. That believer who “loses” his life now will “save” it. If “saving one’s life” in the first part of the verse means “to protect it from death,” then “to lose one’s life” means to pay the ultimate price of giving up one’s life (i.e. martyrdom), the very thing that Jesus was willing to do but which seemed so objectionable to Peter. Thus the believer who is faithful to the Lord to the point of giving up his own life will in the final analysis “save” it. That is, he will have a lot to show for his life of faithfulness to Christ, because he will be amply rewarded, and this he will have to enjoy for all eternity. The price he paid of losing his life in the here and now will be vastly offset by what he gains for eternity. Of course, not every believer will be asked to lay down his life in martyrdom for the Lord’s sake (though many have!). Yet every believer should have this level of commitment, and that is what Jesus is primarily getting at. This understanding of “losing one’s life” by dying for Christ is precisely what makes the “loss of eternal life” view so preposterous. Salvation from the penalty of sin is never offered as the result of martyrdom! Salvation from the penalty of sin is a free gift that comes to one on the basis of *grace*, not for anything one has merited (Eph 2:8–9).

²⁵ Marshall is much more fatalistic in his assessment. Commenting on Luke 9:26, he writes, “The issue in the earlier verses was that of costly discipleship as the way to ultimate salvation.... It is upon one’s attitude to Jesus now that ultimate salvation depends; the point is put negatively: to refuse Jesus leads to rejection by the Son of man at the judgment” (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke; A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978] 376).

b. *Rationale 2: Forfeiting one's life to gain the world is foolish (Mark 8:36).* Jesus went on to in Mark 8:36 to expand the rationale for his call to total commitment, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" Rather inconsistently the NASB (and the NIV) use the translation "soul" in verse 36 rather than "life," though in the Greek text this is the same word as in verse 35 (i.e. ψυχή). The NET Bible is consistent in verse 36: he will "forfeit his life." Not many people will "gain the whole world," but let us imagine for a moment that a person could do this. Will that earthly and temporal "blessing" guarantee what he has in eternity? Obviously not. Ironically, Jesus himself had to face this very choice when the devil tempted him in the wilderness and offered him all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would just fall down and worship him (Matt 4:8–10). Had Jesus done that, he would have sinned and thus have disqualified himself as Savior and of the right to rule over the messianic kingdom. In Jesus' illustration in Mark 8:36, what then does it mean for one to "forfeit his life"? Lane correctly notes, "In developing the thought of the supreme value of life in its deepest sense, Jesus employed language drawn from commercial life: profit, gain, loss, give in exchange. A comparison of values is the proper setting for a consideration of profit and loss."²⁶

The Greek word used to translate "forfeit" (ζημιώω) is used six times in the NT. This word means "to experience the loss of, suffer damage or loss, to forfeit or sustain injury."²⁷ This is the same word used in 1 Cor 3:15 in the passage dealing with one's works being evaluated: "if any man's work is burned up, he will *suffer loss*." There is no reason to think that to "forfeit one's life" means failing to obtain eternal life or losing one's salvation (and thereby going to hell). This is essentially parallel to "losing one's life" as a result of wishing to save it in verse 35.

c. *Rationale 3: Nothing in this world is worth exchanging one's life for (Mark 8:37).* Jesus offered yet another question for the audience: "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:37). Once again, the word "soul" is the same word translated "life" in verse 35 (i.e. ψυχή). The point is related to the previous question. For some, gaining the whole world is something they will make their priority in this life, only to end up impoverished when they face Christ's judgment. Faithfulness to Christ and living for him in this life can lead to a richly rewarded life in the long run (which one will keep for all eternity). This is what comes with hearing the words "well done, good and faithful servant." What would lead a person to give this up? Is there anything in this life so worthwhile that one would trade Christ's commendation of "well done" to have it? Whatever that might be, it would be a lousy and foolish trade!

Verses 35–37 of Mark 8 are not meant to threaten anyone with the loss of eternal life and the peril of going into hell for all eternity. Rather, Jesus was trying to show the wisdom of making a total commitment to him. Following him may begin with a simple commitment, but Jesus makes it clear that it ultimately leads to deeper commitment ... even *absolute surrender*. Trying to preserve one's physical life

²⁶ Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* 309.

²⁷ BDAG 428.

may be the natural tendency that we as humans have, but Jesus called Peter and all other listeners that day to a life of total commitment to him ... a commitment in which they give up their right of clinging to physical life in light of the expectation of gaining a rich reward to cherish for all eternity.

d. *Rationale 4: Jesus will eventually stand as judge of those ashamed of him (Mark 8:38).*

In God's economy, present-day sufferings will eventually be righted, and those who paid a price in this life to follow Christ will in the final analysis be victorious. Lane writes, "The humiliation of the Messiah, announced in Ch. 8:31, is the mysterious prototype of that of the Christian. But even as Jesus spoke of death followed by resurrection, his followers may look beyond a pagan tribunal to the tribunal of the Son of Man where loyalty to Jesus will be honored with vindication."²⁸

As previously pointed out, several Bible scholars have concluded that the judgment in view is that of "final judgment" when the unrighteous are condemned to an eternity in hell. I contend, however, that this verse has the judgment seat of Christ in view, when all believers will have to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ to be evaluated. Though some have asserted that this takes place in heaven during the tribulation following the rapture of the church, I have argued elsewhere that the *time* of this judgment shortly follows the Second Coming of Christ.²⁹ The words of Mark 8:38 confirm the timing of this event: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." The thought of *coming in glory* with the holy angels accurately describes Jesus as he appears at the Second Coming, for it is upon this occasion that the angels accompany him in his return to earth. The Second Coming is so described in Matthew: "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY *with power and great glory*. And He will send forth *His angels* with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:30–31; cf. 2 Thess 1:6–8).

Mark 8:38 is the fourth of the four "*gar* statements" that follow Jesus' call to discipleship in Mark 8:34. Also, although all four *gar* statements ultimately relate to the judgment seat of Christ that follows the Second Coming, this fourth statement is the most explicit of all regarding the time of judgment. In Mark 8:38 Jesus makes clear what he has been alluding to throughout verses 35–37, namely, his Second Coming in glory.³⁰ This is the occasion when the person who wishes to save his life

²⁸ Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* 306.

²⁹ J. Paul Tanner, "The 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb' in Rev 19:6–10: Implications for the Judgment Seat of Christ," *TrinJ* NS 26 (2005) 47–68.

³⁰ Though the traditional interpretation of Mark 8:38 understands Jesus' statement as referring to the future event of his *parousia* (i.e. the Second Coming), R. T. France has opted for a different interpretation, understanding this as reference to what he calls "a new situation" (*Gospel of Mark* 342–43). Essentially, France understands the fulfillment to be not at the future *parousia* of Christ but rather at a scene "set in heaven where God is on the throne surrounded by the angelic court, and its focus is on the enthronement of the υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου to rule over the earth" (p. 342). He bases this interpretation on his belief that first century Jewish readers/hearers of Mark's Gospel would have very likely thought of the

will lose it, when the man who gains the whole world will forfeit (or lose) his life, and when the man who exchanges his life for any other goal in this temporal life will face the foolishness of his choice. At that time he will have to appear before the Lord Jesus.

While each verse of the four *gar* statements provides an illustration of a believer who has failed to deny himself and take up his cross, the final statement in Mark 8:38 focuses on the role that “shame” plays in the choice one makes. Some will have failed to heed Jesus’ call because they wanted to “save” their life. Others will have failed to heed Jesus’ call because they wanted other things out of life (such as gaining the treasures of this world). But Jesus was also concerned about those who simply did not want to face the shame associated with being loyal to him. To these, he says, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him.”

Is it really possible that a true believer—a genuine Christian—could actually be ashamed of Christ and/or what he has said? Apparently so, because the apostle Paul felt a need to exhort his younger cohort Timothy not to be ashamed: “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.”³¹ Furthermore, the apostle John used a related Greek word to describe the possibility of believers (those whom he calls “little children”) shrinking away in shame at Christ’s return: “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not *shrink away* from Him *in shame* at His coming.”³² When John spoke of Christ’s “coming” (*parousía*), he was clearly thinking of the Second Coming in glory, because he added the temporal descriptive “when He appears” to his statement (which confirms again that the judgment seat of Christ follows the Second Coming). The main point, however, is that it is possible for a genuine believer to react in shame at Christ’s return, and it is not inconsistent to speak of Jesus be-

imagery of Dan 7:13–14 where “one like a son of man” is seen *coming* before the Ancient of Days (in heaven) and given glory, dominion, and a kingdom. (France is influenced by the verb *ἔρχομαι* [ἔλθῃ in Mark 8:38] that is also found in the LXX translation of Dan 7:13, though I would point out that the same verb is in the Second Coming passage of Matt 24:30). Hence, France sees the fulfillment in the lifetime of the disciples, but the “coming” (alluding to Dan 7:13) as being the entry of the Son of Man into His kingship over the earth, yet located in the heavenly throne room. Elsewhere he reiterates this point: “The ‘coming’ is, as in Dan 7, a coming to God to receive power and glory, not a coming to earth” (*Gospel of Matthew* 637). In response, I find France’s interpretation unconvincing: (1) it does not adequately explain why Jesus said that “some” of the disciples (a limited number) would see this; (2) it does not explain how the disciples on earth see what is a heavenly scene; and (3) a heavenly scene in fulfillment of Dan 7:13–14 might have some logic to it (Christ’s rejection on earth leading to vindication and glory in heaven), but this view fails in its timing. Is this really the time when shame and reward occur for Jesus’ disciples? (Note the words *ὅταν ἔλθῃ* in Mark 8:38: “*when* He comes.”)

³¹ The Greek word that Paul uses for “being ashamed” in 2 Tim 1:8 (*ἐπαισχύνομαι*) is the same word that Jesus used in Mark 8:38.

³² The words “shrink away ... in shame” are a translation of the one Greek word *αἰσχυνθῶμεν* (from the verb root *αἰσχύνω*). The word that Mark used in Mark 8:38 (“to be ashamed of”) is from the verb root *ἐπαισχύνομαι*, a compound formed from *αἰσχύνω*.

ing ashamed of some Christians.³³ There is nothing in the *shame statement* of Mark 8:38 that would demand that non-Christians must be in view.

At the time Jesus uttered the words found in Mark 8:38, he was in the midst of presenting himself to the nation of Israel as Messiah. Although some boldly sided with Jesus at that time, there were others who opted to be “secret believers.” We see this illustrated in John 12:42–43: “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God” (cf. John 9:22). Very possibly Jesus was thinking of this same tension when he spoke in Mark 8:38 of those who were ashamed of him and his words. This idea receives some support from the reference he makes to “this adulterous and sinful generation.” While every generation throughout history could be labeled a “sinful generation,” the notion of an “adulterous generation” had particular relevance for that particular generation that witnessed the earthly life of Christ. Jesus referred elsewhere to this generation as an “evil and adulterous generation” that sought for a sign as proof of his Messiahship (Matt 12:39; 16:4).³⁴ Jesus’ remarks about being ashamed of him and his words applied first and foremost to those Jews of the first century that witnessed his life and ministry. Those were the days of an “adulterous and sinful generation” of Jews—led by the Pharisees and religious leaders of the nation—who rejected him as Messiah. They intimidated those who confessed Jesus as Messiah by putting them out of the synagogues (John 9:22), thereby ostracizing them from Jewish society. Those who believed in him but did not publicly confess him were inconsistent. Their choice to hide their faith was tantamount to being ashamed of Jesus.

At that future day of his return while accompanied by holy angels, Jesus will express his disapproval at those who acted shamefully on earth in regard to their faith in him. At that time, Jesus will not appear so humbly in unadorned human form as in his first coming; rather he will appear “in His glory and the glory of the Father” (Luke 9:26). Lane writes: “The underlying irony in the situation depicted derives from the veiledness which characterized Jesus’ earthly ministry: he is one of whom men may be ashamed, but he will be openly revealed as the one who possesses the glory of his Father.”³⁵

Matthew alone adds the note, “and will then repay every man according to his deeds,” words drawn from Ps 62:12 (61:13 LXX). To “repay” means that he will either reward or withhold reward in judgment. This supports the notion that the judgment seat of Christ is in view. The emphasis, however, is *not* on punishment but rather reward for faithful service to him. This is discerned by examining the

³³ We should be careful of reading too much into the matter of Jesus being ashamed of someone. Bock states, “For Jesus to be ashamed of someone is for him to reject that person” (*Luke 1:1–9:50* 856). The text, however, only says that Jesus will be ashamed of that person, not that he will reject him.

³⁴ The concept of spiritual adultery as applied to the nation had its roots in OT prophecy. In Hos 3:1, for instance, the unfaithful nation in Hosea’s day was described as “adulterous” (cf. Hos 2:2–6; Isa 57:3–13; Ezek 16:32–41).

³⁵ Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* 311.

whole verse. In the Hebrew text of Ps 62:13, the verse reads like this: “Belonging to You, O Lord, is loving-loyalty (Heb **אֱמוּנָה**), for You repay a man according to His deeds.” The Hebrew word **אֱמוּנָה** is difficult to translate into English, and the NASB rendered it as “lovingkindness.” The NIV, on the other hand, simply translated the first part of the verse, “You, O Lord, are *loving*.” The Hebrew word **אֱמוּנָה**, however, means more than being “loving.” This essentially means the loving ways that God acts, because he is loyal to those in covenant relationship with him. For this reason, I prefer the translation “loving-loyalty.” The NET Bible has captured this quite well: “you, O Lord, demonstrate loyal love; for you repay men for what they do.” The point of Ps 62:13 (Eng. 62:12) is that God is faithful and loyal to those who have entered into covenant relationship with him, and this will be borne out by repaying them for their “deeds,” that is, the works they did in obedience to him and for his glory. He does not allow their *work* to go unrewarded!

Mark 8:38 (taking into account Matt 16:27) seems to depict two ends of the spectrum regarding believers in Christ. On the one end will be those who were ashamed of him and kept their faith secret rather than risking their reputation (and lives!) with men. At the judgment seat of Christ, they will hear words of rebuke from the Lord Jesus expressing how ashamed he is of the stance they took. On the other end of the spectrum will be those who had no shame of the Lord Jesus and faithfully served him while on earth, doing “deeds” for his glory (because they were created in Christ Jesus for *good works*—Eph 2:10). Jesus will repay them for their service and the work they did. As France so eloquently put it, “Shame here and now is a small price to pay for acknowledgement and honour then.”³⁶ In between these two ends of the spectrum will be a full range of other people, some more to the “shame” side and others more to the reward side. We should balance this statement, however, by pointing out what is said in 1 Cor 4:5, “each man’s praise will come to him from God.” When the Lord Jesus comes again, apparently he will have some word of commendation for every believer, regardless of how faithful or faithless they have been.

V. JESUS’ PREDICTION OF SEEING HIM IN KINGDOM GLORY (MATT 16:28; MARK 9:1; LUKE 9:27)

The chapter division at Mark 9:1 is rather unfortunate, as this verse is better taken as part of the paragraph beginning with Mark 8:31 (note that in Matthew’s Gospel the chapter break occurs after this verse).³⁷ The change of scene begins at Mark 9:2. Hence the final verse of the “cost of discipleship” passage states, “And Jesus was saying to them, ‘Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are

³⁶ France, *Gospel of Mark* 342.

³⁷ France concurs: “I have chosen to treat 8:31–9:1 as a single unit, and to set it off from 8:27–30, because these verses are all bound together by the theme of suffering and death, starkly introduced in 8:31, and explored in its implications both for Jesus and for his disciples up to and including 9:1” (*Gospel of Mark* 332).

standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power” (Mark 9:1).

There is a long debate as to when and how this prediction is fulfilled.³⁸ France provides a helpful short list of the more noteworthy views: “They include Jesus’ death on the cross and the symbolic tearing of the temple curtain; his victory over death in the resurrection; his ascension and the heavenly enthronement which it implies; the powerful coming of the Spirit at Pentecost; the dynamic growth of the Church despite opposition; the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, understood as the point at which the authority of the Son of Man supplanted that of the earthly city.”³⁹

Contextually, however, Jesus’ comment in Mark 9:1 cannot be seen in isolation from the following pericope of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8). The words “six days later” in Mark 9:2 compel the reader to see the connection. Furthermore, the word “some” (τινες) in Mark 9:1 indicates a limited experience, which precisely fits the parameters of the transfiguration account. According to Mark 9:2, Jesus took the “inner circle” of Peter, James and John, and ascended a high mountain, following which he was transfigured before them. Hence the prediction concerning “some of those who are standing here” found its fulfillment with these three disciples. They certainly did not “taste death” before seeing this great event, because it happened a mere six days later.⁴⁰

According to Jesus’ prediction, they would see “the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” The following paragraph (Mark 9:2–8) said nothing about a kingdom. Nevertheless, there is certainly a strong connection between what they saw and the kingdom. Matthew provides an important clue to the connection, for according to Matt 16:28 the disciples would not taste death “until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” How they *saw* “the Son of Man” is the important element. His radical and supernatural transfiguration was a glimpse or preview of how he will look in his kingdom glory (i.e. following the Second Coming).⁴¹

³⁸ For a helpful discussion of views, see K. E. Brower, “Mark 9:1: Seeing the Kingdom in Power,” *JSNT* 6 (1980) 17–41; and more recently, Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 858–60. Cf. Michael Bird, “The Coming of Jesus as the Fulfillment of Mark 9:1,” *TrinJ* NS 24 (2003) 22–36.

³⁹ France, *Gospel of Mark* 344–45.

⁴⁰ France in his commentary on Matthew seems to waver between two interpretations of Jesus’ prediction. On the one hand he sees this fulfilled in a post-resurrection setting: “Perhaps the simplest answer is to link these words with the further allusion to Dan 7:14 in 28:18, where after the resurrection eleven of them (‘some,’ not all, following the death of Judas) will encounter Jesus now endowed with ‘all authority in heaven and on earth’” (*Gospel of Matthew* 640–41). Yet he also admits that the interpretation I have suggested (the transfiguration scene) better suits the phrase “some of those standing here.” Hence, he goes on to say, “But it is likely that Matthew ... saw in this vision at least a proleptic fulfillment of Jesus’ solemn words in v. 28, even though the truth of Jesus’ kingship was to be more concretely embodied in later events following his resurrection” (p. 641). Arguing against France is Edward Adams, “The Coming of the Son of Man in Mark’s Gospel,” *TynBul* 56 (2005) 39–61.

⁴¹ Edwards dismisses a connection of this passage to the Second Coming, despite Jesus’ reference to his “coming” in glory in Mark 8:38. He opts instead to see the fulfillment of Mark 8:38 in the death and resurrection of Jesus: “The context of 9:1, as 8:31 establishes, is not the Parousia as is often supposed, but the death and resurrection of Jesus, which did transpire in the lifetime of the hearers. The interpretation of 9:1 with reference to the resurrection claims a long history of support that goes back to many fathers in the early church” (*Gospel according to Mark* 260). For Edwards, the account in Mark 9:2–8

This is quite related to the discipleship passage. Jesus had just spoken in Mark 8:38 of how he would come “in the glory of His Father with the holy angels,” and Mark 9:2–8 records how these three disciples received a glimpse ahead to just how he will appear when he comes in glory. Bock concurs, “It appears more likely that the remarks anticipate the transfiguration, with its glimpse of the future glory of Jesus. This kind of ‘patterned’ event, where a short-term event patterns one coming later, is common in Jesus’ teaching, as the Olivet discourse will show.”⁴²

In that future day, Jesus will not look the same at all in comparison with how he was seen in his first coming. His human body that he received in his incarnation was something of a “shield” that kept people from seeing his divine glory (cf. Isa 53:2). One of the purposes of the transfiguration account was to reveal to these disciples how he will look when he returns in glory to reign in his kingdom. Of course, they would later record this for others to understand and appreciate. Later in life Peter wrote: “We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.... So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention” (2 Pet 1:16, 18). To have seen Jesus in his kingdom glory would have made an indelible impression upon the three disciples, helping them to take seriously the fact of their Lord’s return, his kingdom, and the accountability they will certainly face at that time. The very one who announced he would be rejected and killed is now seen in his kingdom glory. Earthly humiliation has given way to kingdom glory. Just as Jesus knew his destiny and that the sufferings of the near future were but the pathway to true glory, so his disciples needed to learn and apply this same principle to their lives. This was meant to help them with their responsibility to deny themselves and take up their cross daily in following him.⁴³

is a prolepsis of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Besides the fact that Edwards’s view does not do sufficient justice to seeing the Son of Man *in his kingdom*, I would also point out that it is not at the time of Jesus’ resurrection that believers face a time of accountability (which all of Mark 8:34–38 points toward).

⁴² Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture* 234. Marshall rather reluctantly admits the possibility of a connection of Jesus’ prediction in Mark 9:1 with the transfiguration, but then retreats from it: “It is, however, also possible that the saying was seen by the Evangelists as bearing some relation to the transfiguration, which can be regarded as a revelation of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus; but this extension of meaning is secondary since the saying does not fit very neatly into the context; one does not speak of ‘not dying’ before seeing an event within the next few days” (Marshall, *Gospel of Luke* 379). Instead, Marshall prefers to see that the “presence of the kingdom to which Luke is referring lies in the evidence of its power seen in the events of the resurrection and Pentecost” (p. 378). Lane, on the other hand, concurs with Bock: “The immediate sequel to Jesus’ solemn promise is the account of the transfiguration (Ch. 9:2–8). This indicates that Mark understood Jesus’ statement to refer to this moment of transcendent glory conceived as an enthronement and an anticipation of the glory which is to come” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* 313–14).

⁴³ The fact that Peter would go on to deny the Lord three times subsequent to his experience on the mount of transfiguration is a testimony to the frailty of human nature, and underscores why all believers have a *daily* need to take up their cross in following Jesus.

VI. CONCLUSION

Jesus' challenge to his followers in Mark 8:31–9:1 concerning the cost of discipleship represents some of the strongest language that the Lord uttered to those who would follow him. Concepts such as "losing one's life" and "saving one's life" have proved difficult to understand, and not surprisingly a great deal of misunderstanding has arisen over what Jesus meant. Frequently in scholarly analyses the assumption is made that Jesus was referring to the gaining or losing of "eternal life." In this paper, however, I have sought to demonstrate that this is not the case.

The very fact that the Lord's words are addressed first and foremost to Peter (the believer) and the other disciples making up "the twelve" should caution us against reading the loss of eternal life into this passage. Yet there are several other observations from a study of the text that confirm that loss of eternal life is not in view.

The main statement of Jesus' remarks is found in Mark 8:34 where the Lord clarified that following him ultimately meant denying oneself and taking up one's cross. This challenge was made in response to Peter's faulty thinking that Jesus should not "be killed." Jesus was calling for Peter (and everyone else who wanted to follow him) to set aside his way of thinking and submit to God's will, even to the point of suffering martyrdom, if necessary. The four $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ statements in Mark 8:35–38 provide an explanation to Jesus' call for total commitment to him. The following three observations substantiate that the loss of eternal life was not the issue in these statements. First, from Luke's account we understand that Jesus defined the taking up of one's cross as a *daily* commitment, thereby revealing that salvation from the penalty of sin (a one-time transaction) was not what he had in mind. Second, the concept of "save a life" in the NT (note Mark 3:4) was an expression used of avoiding physical death, and thus the word "save" should not be taken here in a soteriological sense. To be consistent, the idea of "losing one's life" needs to be understood in the same manner (i.e. losing physical life). Yet nowhere in Scripture is the idea of salvation or justification ever conditioned on one's willingness to merit it by virtue of martyrdom. So a different "saving" must be in view for the person who loses his physical life for Christ's sake. Third, Matthew's quotation of Ps 62:12 concerning future judgment when Jesus "will then repay every man according to his deeds" suggests that this verse looks to the rewarding of believers for covenant faithfulness. A look back to the full context of Ps 62:12 reveals that this is an action done by the Lord that demonstrates "loving-loyalty" (אֱהָבָה) to those in covenant relationship with him. Such activity is more suited to the judgment seat of Christ that will come about following the Second Coming when he returns in glory, a glimpse of which the three disciples received on the mount of transfiguration.

If these verses are meant as a challenge to true believers, and the loss of eternal life is not the issue, then the "punch" of the passage falls on those of us who are regenerated Christians. The only appropriate response we can make is a total commitment to Jesus Christ to the point of losing our own life. By way of application, if those of us who are Christians must be willing to give up our own life for Christ, certainly we should be willing to suffer in order to follow him and serve him.

“Comfortable Christianity” is the siren seductively luring us to crash on the rocks of personal ruin. A wasted life with nothing to show for itself is a sad fate, especially if prompted by a sense of shame for Christ and his words. If we truly valued our lives, we would be concerned for what we have to gain for all eternity, not merely for what we can have in this world. Discipleship is costly—Jesus said so!