

**You are the Christ**  
**Mark 8:27-38**

Friends, it's been almost ten years since the movie trilogy "The Matrix" dominated the silver screen and the DVD market.

But perhaps you remember the anticipation, the hype and the media frenzy which accompanied each installment of the story as they were released. Especially when part three "The Matrix... Revolutions" hit theaters back in 2003.

And the big question was how would the story end? Would Neo – the ONE.. somehow be able to lead the small band of humans to victory against the all-powerful machines? Everyone was eager to find out.

Now most epic stories about good vs. evil usually lead to a climactic battle where the decisive victory is won in when the outnumbered forces of good somehow snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and come from behind to overthrow the superior forces of evil.

And that's what I was expecting in the conclusion of the story of the Matrix.

However, the final battle between Neo – The ONE... and the infamous Agent Smith does not work out that way. These two titans battle against each other in a colossal contest of strength and power. It's a duel that shakes heaven and earth and as it progresses it becomes apparent that Agent Smith is the stronger of the two.

And watching the battle, I kept waiting for that critical moment where even though Agent Smith was stronger, and Neo was on the ropes - Neo would somehow reach down inside and summon all his remaining strength and deliver that fatal blow which would destroy his enemy.

But it never came.

In the end Agent Smith's power and strength overcame Neo. And I watched as Agent Smith prepared to destroy the defeated figure of Neo – and I was totally surprised to see that it was in

that act of destruction that somehow Agent Smith was destroyed himself.

Now I'm sorry to spoil the ending for you if you haven't seen the movie yet but hey... you've had almost ten years to watch it – so I don't feel too bad.

But I was disappointed to see the story end this way. I felt cheated – I had expected to see Good open up a can of “Kick-But” and thrash Evil into oblivion. It didn't feel right that the story had ended this way.

If you saw it maybe you felt the same way too?

And if that's so.... then you have some sense of how Peter felt after He had just proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah - The One... and then Jesus begins to speak of how **the Messiah would suffer, be rejected and eventually be killed!**

That is not how the story of the Messiah was supposed to turn out.

The story of the Messiah was supposed to end as Daniel had foreseen in his vision.

<sup>13</sup>“**In my vision at night** I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Dan 7)

**Jesus shatters the disciples expectations** when he says “The Son of Man” will be rejected by those who represent the Ancient of Days and His presence which is the Temple in Jerusalem – the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law.

He completely contradicts the hope that the Son of Man would be the one who will deliver Israel from foreign oppression when He says that He must be killed.

And Peter can't stand it, he won't stand for it – the promise and the hope of the glorious and victorious Messiah is the only

hope for the future of Israel, it's what keeps them going and it's why they are following Jesus.

Now I can picture how this plays out in my mind – Peter rushes up to Jesus, puts his arm around him and pulls him around and away from the rest of the group.

He sputters out – Master what are you saying??? You can't talk like this!! You'll demoralize everyone – we're expecting you to restore God's Chosen people to greatness – like King David and King Solomon – you can't die!

And to be honest that's what I kind of felt like doing with Jesus message to us this morning too. Just like I was disappointed with the way the Matrix trilogy ended, I also felt like saying...

*“Jesus...what are you saying! I have people in my congregation who come in here Sunday morning feeling discouraged and beat up from the pressures of life, from spending the week around people who are hostile to Christians, they feel disillusioned because they see more bad in this world*

*than good, and in spite of their best efforts your church doesn't seem to be growing - this isn't what they need to hear!*

*They need to know you've come to kick Satan's butt, and that you give them strength to go out and conquer whatever stands in their way in life. Didn't you say yourself and I quote “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full!” (John 10:10)*

But the Holy Spirit convicted me that people do **need to hear what Jesus** said this morning especially if they are discouraged, beat-up and disillusioned.

Because friends, when we're in that cynical state we are so vulnerable to the enemy's deception and we don't even realize it.

It doesn't take much to convince us that we should use whatever power, strength, and force is available to us to fight whoever is opposing us and without realizing it we've “joined the dark side” and become exactly like those we are fighting against.

So while Jesus rebuke of “get behind me Satan” to Peter’s well-intentioned but miss-guided interference seems to be harsh, it is in fact a loving warning to prevent Peter in his vulnerable state from inadvertently siding with the enemy.

Jesus does not want this – he needs to teach us how to fight the battle so that we do not loose heart when we it seems we are loosing... and **so that we don’t loose by winning.**

So friends, listen to what Jesus has to say to those of us who He has called to be his disciples, to those of us who want to follow that call...

He says **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”** In other words...it’s not about you – it’s about me. Life is all about Jesus – Jesus is Lord of all, of everything we do.

You see friends the location where our story takes place is important – this happens near the town of Caesarea Philippi. A town and temple which were named in honor of the ruler of the Roman Empire – Caesar, and the Roman Empire existed for

the glory of the Emperor. Loyal subjects of the Emperor believed this and declared their allegiance by swearing “Caesar is Lord” and “Hail Caesar.”

If you did not declare Caesar is Lord you were either a traitor or an enemy soldier... and the Empire dealt with such people by executing them publically – on a cross.

So “deny yourself and take up the cross” is a call for people to put Jesus in place of Caesar and risk being considered a traitor or an enemy of the Empire and to face the consequences that went along with it.

Now the notion that a state and its citizens exists for the glory and the promotion of the sovereign of that state is completely foreign to us. No matter how ardent a Conservative you are, nobody expects you to swear “Stephen Harper is Lord.” Not even Stephen Harper☺

But seriously friends, while our government may be democratic and our head of state only a figurehead in reality the Empire of Western Culture has millions of Emperors...

because our society is built on the expectation that each person has the right to pursue whatever will make them happy. Life is about us, our goals, our visions, our desires, our dreams, our rights...

If you were to say instead that life is about Jesus, about his goals, his visions, his desires, his dreams, and his rights as Lord...well you'd be considered a traitor to our way of life and you'd be marginalized to the edges of society where all things irrelevant and passé go to die in obscurity.

But friends, Jesus encourages us – deny yourself and take up your cross – put me in place of yourself at the center of life and be willing to suffer the consequences of that. Remember, I love you and all that, but it's not about you...it's about me.

Then Jesus says *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”*

The Jews of Jesus day were often willing to take up arms in rebellion against the Romans in an effort to try and win back

their freedom and “save their way of life.” Acts 5 describes two such attempts:

*<sup>36</sup> Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. (Acts 5)*

Friends these rebellions were often heroic but futile and ended in death for those involved and nothing was accomplished through their sacrifice.

Today too there is no end of noble causes, charities, environmental organizations, and professions like teaching and law and healthcare that we can invest our lives in so to speak to try to save this world and make it a better place.

And people have dedicated and sacrificed their lives for these causes – both metaphorically and literally – but our world still needs more saving and more work to make it a better place.

Maybe we should hear Jesus saying this instead *“for whoever wants to make a difference or be relevant in this world- won’t, but whoever gives up their effectiveness or their relevance for me and for the gospel will end up making the greatest difference of all”*

You see friends, being a disciple of Jesus is something that we can dedicate and sacrifice our lives for – both metaphorically and literally – and in the end it will not be wasted, it will not be irrelevant or indifferent –

even if it appears to be... because we’ve been pushed out of public life and dismissed because of our insistence on including Jesus and the gospel in our professions, our careers, our causes, charities, environmental organizations, and governments.

It will count for something friends because one day Jesus is coming back!

Jesus says *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be*

*ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”*

Peter wasn’t wrong to expect that the story of the Messiah was going to end up as it is described in Daniel’s vision where the Son of Man - Jesus - is given all authority, and power and dominion and He establishes a kingdom which will never end.

It was just wrong that Peter expected this to be accomplished through a campaign of divine shock and awe.

Jesus needed to correct Peter and teach the disciples that the road to establishing the kingdom of heaven and defeating the enemy powers which opposed it was going to be accomplished through weakness, suffering and his death...but friends make no mistake about where this road leads....

Resurrection, victory and one day the Son of Man coming in glory with the armies of Heaven, that will be the time for shock and awe...

But for now friends, suffering persecution, being marginalized – losing our lives both metaphorically or literally for the sake of Christ and the gospel is not an indication that we've thrown in our lot with the losing side.

It is in fact proof that things are right on track – in God's plan to save the world...**victory comes through defeat, salvation comes through suffering, life comes through death.**

This is how Christ wants us to fight against the enemy so that we do not slip over to the dark side as we battle against it, so that we do not lose by what we think is winning.

Friends, these are the words of Christ that we need to hear – words that encourage us if we are feeling discouraged or dismayed in our life and ministry. Words which reassure us that we have chosen wisely to become Christ's disciples.

So no matter what struggles you are going through, no matter what difficulties your faith creates for you, no matter how defeated you feel because you have chosen to follow Christ...

remember- this is the path to victory and if we persevere on it for Christ's sake - He will be pleased to acknowledge us to His Father when He returns in glory and makes this world new once again – and we will be a part of His Kingdom – the new heavens and the new earth - which will never end.

So friends take heart and be encouraged – if you are a disciple of Jesus... suffering leads to salvation, death leads to life, and defeat ultimately leads to life! Amen.