

# TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ February 21, 2016

<sup>31</sup> He then began to teach them that the **Son of Man** must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” <sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? <sup>38</sup> 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.” (Mark 8:31-38)**

Behold the Lamb of God for sinners slain,

Have you ever been through a house of mirrors? Usually they’re an attraction found at fairs or carnivals. Participants must work their way through a maze with mirrors. Sometimes those mirrors are your everyday average mirrors. Other mirrors distort your figure based on the mirrors being convex or concave. But it’s not just in carnival games that you find different shapes and styles of mirrors. I remember as a kid making a home-made periscope using two small mirrors. Some mirrors may distort, while others magnify. Sometimes some women use these mirrors to get ready in the morning with make-up, etc.

Chances are you look in a regular mirror at least a couple of times every day. That would be comparable to when we come to church during most of the year – we look in the mirror of God’s law and see how we compare. But during the season of Lent, it’s a little different. We take a closer look. We look into a magnifying mirror, where we can see every blackhead, every out of place hair, every stain on our coffee-stained teeth. And when we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR**, we shouldn’t like what we see.

The gospel writer Mark refers to this magnifying mirror in the gospel we just read for this morning. Did you catch it? Mark shares with us the heart of what Lent is about – denial. But not just a denial of a guilty pleasure, but the denial of self. It’s the denial that we see complete need for when we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR**.

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Think about how difficult those words were to hear. Jesus had gained quite a following throughout Israel with his teaching and miracles. He had been drawing comparisons to the great prophets from the Old Testament. In fact, perhaps only hours before he had asked his 12 disciples who they thought he was. It was then that Peter gave the wonderful testimony – “**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.**”

But then things changed. Jesus began to teach them about what was to come, specifically that “**the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the religious leaders and that he must be**

**killed.”** Jesus didn’t just say this could happen, he said this had to happen. This didn’t make any sense to Peter, if Jesus was the Messiah then why did this have to happen? And so he took Jesus aside to protect him from Jesus. Peter rebuked him and said that you can’t talk like this, this isn’t what is supposed to happen to the Messiah.

I’m sure Peter had all the right intentions. But he wasn’t thinking about the big picture. He wasn’t thinking about the necessity for Jesus to go through and do this. In short, he hadn’t **TAKEN A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR**. And for this, Jesus not only set him straight, but he had to set him straight, he had to rebuke him with some very strong language, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** Jesus was not accusing Peter of being Satan, but having in mind the things that Satan has in mind, which is just as dangerous.

Then, just to make sure that everybody knew how serious he was about what he was talking about, Jesus gathered everyone around him, and shared the beating heart of Christianity. **“Whoever wants to be my disciple, must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”** In that sentence there are three important imperatives that make up a Christian. But it all starts with the first phrase, it all starts with **TAKING A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR**.

**“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves.”** First of all, Jesus isn’t saying that everyone needs to do this, he isn’t forcing anyone into being a disciple. He is merely saying if you wanted to be a disciple, if you want to be a believer, the first thing you must do is deny yourself. It’s like any job description – it lays out what is expected if you take that job. The same is true with a disciple of Jesus – it’s a job description, this is what you can expect.

During Lent, there are any number of people who will deny themselves something that they like – perhaps a type a dessert, perhaps Facebook or a Facebook game, perhaps it’s giving up alcohol. The purpose is to give up something we like or enjoy to remind us of what Jesus gave up. But Jesus here is saying that being a disciple is more than just denying things we like for a short amount of time. He is talking about denying our very selves – everything about you – inside and out.

Now why does Jesus say to do this? The answer is pretty simple, we’re not good enough, we’re not worth anything. Sometimes we might get the idea that sin is just some minor blemish that we can cover up, or make up for, but it’s more than that. Sin infects everything about who we are. Our sins are not just the angry words we say to our spouse or our kids. Our sins are not just the wicked and lazy thoughts we have on more than one occasion. Our sins influence our actions, our sins influence our thoughts so that we can trust neither. We were born in sin and we will die in sin. This is why we need to **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR** and see the reason to deny yourself – because no sinner can have any part of heaven.

But that’s not how our mind thinks a lot of the time, and that’s not what we hear most of the time. So, let me show how untrustworthy our thoughts can be. When was the last time you really felt guilty over a sin? I don’t just mean that you realized it was a sin, I mean when you felt guilty about that said sin? Compare that to the times when we haven’t given our sins a second thought. I’ll confess, I don’t feel guilty about my sins near often enough. Instead, I feel more guilt when I’ve let someone down, or when I forgot something I should have remembered. Far too often I have felt more guilt over disappointing someone else than I have felt guilt over disappointing my God.

Mark makes an apt comparison at the end of our gospel section this morning. He said, **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be**

**ashamed of them.”** The act of adultery discovered brings shame. Committing spiritual adultery against God is the worst sort of adultery. Because every time we sin, we have been unfaithful to our God. And yet the logic of the world, the logic of our own sinful nature convinces us that it’s not a big deal.

If it were not a big deal then we could just fix the blemishes ourselves and not need to deny everything about us. If it were not a big deal, then Peter would be completely right in telling Jesus his words were foolish. If it were not a big deal, then Jesus would not have needed to be sent. But when we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR** we see it is a big deal and the precise need to deny self – there’s nothing in us that is good. We see the precise need for Jesus to be killed. It was for us. **“While we were still sinners”** Paul declared in Romans, **“Christ died for us.”** It was our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross, it is our sins the require us to deny ourselves if we want any part of God.

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This denial of self is not easy, this denial of self does not come naturally. But the only way we get to heaven is by denying self and relying on Christ. When we follow Christ two things naturally happen – we listen to him and we bear our cross.

This was a lesson that Peter along with the other disciples had to learn. They thought they knew how the story with Jesus was going to end. One day, they thought, Jesus would march into Jerusalem and take over and they would be his inner counsel. But this was not the plan God had in mind, and at this time, Jesus really needed his disciples to listen to him. To listen not only to the wonderful and amazing stuff, but to listen to the difficult-to-swallow stuff too. Hearing that Jesus must be killed was difficult to swallow. Hearing that Jesus would rise again was impossible to believe. And yet the disciples needed to listen, they needed to **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR**. Just like we do.

When we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR** we see that we don’t have all the answers. When we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR** we see that we don’t have the big picture in mind. When we **TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR** we trust that God knows what he’s talking about, and so we listen to him not only the wonderful and amazing stuff, but the difficult-to-swallow stuff too. We listen to him when he tells us that sin not only is damaging to the new relationship we have with God, but it is also damaging to ourselves. We listen to him when he says we must call out anyone who speaks any deviation from God’s Word – whether publically or privately, because this too is damaging to faith. We listen to him when he tells us not to worry, because he is in control.

Just like denying self is not easy and takes work, so does listening to him. Listening to him does not come easy and it does take work. We don’t just listen to him once, but we are constantly listening to him. Listening to him means we take up our cross. What is our cross? It’s anything we suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Our crosses will likely change as we pass through different stages of life. One cross could be denying self-gratification. Another cross might be confusion of priorities. As we move up the corporate ladder, get busy with family, our priorities can shift more worldly than spiritually. And yet another cross could be callousness. A callousness to listen to what others, who want to help you, have to say, a callousness towards God’s Word thinking that you know it all already so what more could I learn by coming to church or Bible Class. It would be so easy to lay down these crosses and say they don’t matter, that since Christ has done it all I don’t need to bear mine.

But that's where we need to TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR and remember to deny self, take up that cross we bear, and follow him. For Christ bore his cross so that the world might be saved. And the reason we must bear crosses in our life, is so that we might remember to look towards him. Because it's not about me and that can be so comforting. Because it's not about me, I don't have to question whether I'm getting to heaven or not. Because it's not about me, I don't have to worry about what others will think about my God. Because it's not about me, makes it slightly easier to deny self.

Just like we TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR before going out for the day to make sure our hair is in place, let's remember to TAKE A GOOD LOOK IN THE MIRROR of God's Law this Lenten season. For when we do, we remember to deny self and rely on him. Amen.