



February 24-25-26, 2024 – 2nd Sunday of Lent

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: **How Jesus Handles Worst-Case Scenarios**

1. **By focusing us on God's Word**

2. **By following God's Will**

Sermon Text: Mark 8: 31-38

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. ³² He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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 concerns of God, but merely human concerns." ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ 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."

Dear Christian friends,

You just never know, do you? You never know what curve balls that life will throw at you or what lurks around the next corner. You never know when you will be called on to perform an act of bravery that will result in life or death by your very actions. Sounds kind of dramatic – doesn't it? There's a best-selling book that claims it will help you at times like this. It's called: *The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook*. Written by Joshua Piven & David Borgenicht, this book provides instructions on how to escape from the trunk of a car, how to fend off a shark, or how to deal with a charging bull. For most people, these situations are outrageous, unlikely events that mathematically just won't happen. But, for those of us who are accident-prone or who constantly find ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, this book just might be a life-saver. It's a book that gets its info from experts like stuntmen, Navy SEALs, and pilots. It's a how-to book that will show you step-by-step instructions how to make fire without matches, how to determine if your date is an ax-murderer, or how to escape from the trunk of a car.

This book takes into account Murphy's Law: *if anything can go wrong, it will*. A book like this might help you with life on earth, but it sure won't help you with eternity. For eternity, we need to turn to another book that is a must-read. And of-course, that's the Bible. The Bible tells us why Murphy's Law is often true, why things go wrong. Romans 8:22 says: ***We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*** The world is groaning because sin has infected every square inch of our planet. Even more deadly and damning, sin has

infected every man, woman, and child – including you and me. Certainly, the Bible tells us how to deal with sin. It tells us, not to ignore our sins or try to earn favor with God by our own merits. Instead, God teaches us to take every one of our sins to the cross of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus freely gives forgiveness for every sin and help for every situation. Scripture doesn't tell us if Jesus ever had to deal with a charging bull or had to fend off a shark. Instead, it tells us how Jesus dealt with the problems of real life. More importantly, it tells us how Jesus had to deal with worst-case scenarios like sin, death, and hell. So He's qualified to speak on the subject as being both human who understands our human condition, and God who helps every single person, no matter how desperate the circumstances. So today, in our sermon reading, Jesus shows us **How to Handle Worst-Case Scenarios**. He does this by first of all by focusing on God's Word. And secondly, He does this by following His Father's Will.

What's the worst thing that can happen to you, humanly speaking? For a parent, I think one of the worst things that can happen is to have your child wander off and not exactly know where he/she went. Oh, but, it can get harder, can't it? To senior citizen, a worst-case-scenario is that you get a letter from your insurance company that says: "I'm sorry to inform you that your health insurance has maxed out. Your coverage is now terminated." To the person who's hospitalized, a worse-case-scenario is that the doctor who says: "don't make plans to go home anytime soon, if ever". Talk about a worst-case-scenario. But, let's turn our attention to Jesus who understands our worst-case-scenarios ... perfectly.

Our reading begins: 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.*** Do you like going to the Brown County Free Fair? I do. A popular place to go is the Midway. That's the place where games of skill are mixed with booming voices. These are the voices that say: step right up and win a prize. And if you're not paying attention, these voices can lull you into parting with your money real quick. It's times like these we need to focus on just walking right through. That's what we see Jesus doing here in our sermon reading. He was focused on His God-given mission to save the world – literally. But first, Jesus had to undergo a truly worst-case scenario: He suffered at the hands of those who should've protected Him. He was mocked and mistreated, tortured at the hand of sinners and killed at the cross. But, Jesus wasn't in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was focused on God's Word and was teaching His disciples, ahead of time, exactly what would happen, what must happen: God's plan to save us from sin. Jesus wasn't distracted by voices that tried to stop Him, including the voice of his dear friend Peter. Listen to what happened: ³²***He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*** Peter was the self-appointed leader of the 12 disciples who had the attitude of "ready, fire aim." He didn't want Jesus to be hurt. But, if he had succeeded in stopping Jesus, God's plan to save the world would've failed. In that moment, Peter wasn't considering God's Word. He was only following his own human emotions. 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."*** You could say: Jesus took Peter out to the woodshed with these

strong words. Jesus plainly told Peter that he was wrong. Peter was thinking earthly. But, Jesus was thinking heavenly.

2000 years later, God's Word still speaks to us. And Jesus still shows us **How to Handle Worst-Case Scenarios**. First, we need to focus on God's Word in everything. Some years ago, I was called up to the hospital in the middle of the night. One of our members was about to have emergency surgery. I was able to see him in the ICU. I still remember our brief conversation and prayer. I asked him what is the worst thing that could happen during surgery. Of course, he answered the worst thing that could happen would be that he'd die on the operating table. Then, I asked him what would happen to him as a Christian believer. He answered: "Well, then I'd go to heaven." So I asked him again, is what the worst thing that could happen. He said with a surprised look on his face: "I'd come out of surgery alive." But, isn't that the truth? Too often our finite minds convince us that the worst thing that could happen to us and those we love is that'd we'd die. But, God's Word says something far different as believers in Christ. The apostle Paul puts it this way in Philippians 1:23: ***I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*** Well, that member did survive the surgery that night. I remember the last thing he told me was: "Let's go!" This humble Christian was ready to face whatever the LORD planned for him. God's Word had touched him. But, there will come a day, when it's his turn to experience death, like all of us. He's not worried. And we don't worry either. Whatever happens to us here on earth, we have heaven waiting for us, made possible only by the sacrifice of our LORD Jesus Christ.

But, in our sermon reading, Jesus didn't just stop there. Instead, He continued teaching us how to handle worst-case scenarios by helping believers follow God's will. Our sermon reading continues: ³⁶***What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?*** ³⁷***Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*** Here Jesus outlines the ultimate worst-case scenario: losing your soul for all eternity in hell. Many spend their time on earth seeking temporary pleasure, positions, and power. But, Jesus says here that's ultimately worthless. In eternity, those things just won't matter. It's not worth losing your soul. So my friends, what are you seeking? What are you spending your energy on: earthly or eternal things? Well, Jesus has some how-to advice how to spend our earthly time. He says: : ***"whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.*** Jesus isn't looking for couch-potato Christians. He's not looking for followers who are Christian in "name-only." Jesus is speaking to believers now. He says that if we want to remain strong in our faith, just follow his three step plan: ***deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him.*** Deny yourself the option to live outside the 10 Commandments. That's not always easy, but just think how easy it was for Christ to die on the cross. Next, ***take up our cross.*** That means, if Jesus suffered here in this world for witnessing to the world, we shouldn't be surprised if it's a little inconvenient. And finally ***follow Jesus.*** The early disciples discovered the joy of following Jesus. They weren't just following a cause, but the Christ who came that we might have life and have it to the full, even in worst-case scenarios.

A man, while walking at night, tripped and fell off a mountain cliff. By some miracle, he grabbed a branch. Hundreds of feet below was certain death. Above him, it was hopeless that he'd be able to rescue himself. It was truly a worst-case scenario. Suddenly a voice boomed that seemed to come from heaven: **LET GO AND LET GOD.** He just couldn't bring himself to let go. Instead, he agonized all night, holding on for dear life. But, at first light of day, the man could see what the voice was talking about. About two feet below him was a ledge that he could drop to safety. How foolish he was to ignore that advice. He only hung on to what he could see and understand. Don't we often do that? We hold on to what we see and understand instead of hanging on to God and His Word. So what will you do, the next time you encounter a worst-case scenario? Focus and follow or doubt and fail? Depend on Jesus to Handle Your Worst-Case Scenarios. He never let you down, not in this life nor in the life to come. Amen.