

The Gospel of Mark  
Mark 8. 31-38  
October 19, 2014

## Introduction

- The crowds and disciples struggle to grasp not only Jesus' identity, but his mission.
  - 4,000 fed (8. 11-13) missing it.
  - The leaven of pride (8. 14-21) beware of it.
  - What about lunch? (8. 14-21) still not getting it.
  - Blindness healed (8. 22-26) a hint. Second touch.
  - Who am I, crowds? (8. 27-30) prophet, John?
  - Who am I, disciples? (8. 27-30) Messiah.
  - The story continues...

*31 Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead. 32 As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.*

- Jesus moves from accepting the Messiah label to elaborating on his mission. Perhaps not what his disciples had in mind when they signed up to follow him.
- In the previous passage Peter calls Jesus the Messiah – but does he get it?
- Jesus says he's going to be rejected by Israel's leadership, die but come back to life. He predicts his future journey. Jesus knows what he's walking into.
- Peter, on the other hand, doesn't like this kind of talk so he tells Jesus off. He must have a different perspective of what kind of Messiah Jesus is.
- Consider Peter's arrogance in this. It's possible to be confident and wrong. It's possible to be so strong willed we'll actually feel we've got the right to tell God how it's going to be!

- What is Peter's problem here?
  - If Jesus is this kind of leader, what does that mean for Peter and the disciples?
- The disciples need a second touch, like the blind man.

**33** *Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."*

- Peter isn't the only one with concerns. Perhaps he represents the rest of the gang.
- Jesus' words might seem harsh, but he sees to the heart and recognizes the motivation of his disciples' want to arrest his mission.
- The point of Jesus' statement is this: a selfish, prideful vantage point is that of Satan, not God.
- Again, it's possible that Jesus' followers can get it wrong sometimes, and can insert un-Godly, self-centered attitudes where they don't belong.
- Learning to follow Jesus is about service and humility – and we get it wrong so often – but he is gracious and our vision is getting clearer. These are life-long lessons.
- The point is this: I don't adapt the gospel to fit my life-style; my life-style must be transformed by the gospel. I don't make God look like me; God makes me look like him.
- And this is challenging - Isaiah 55. 8-9

**8** *"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. 9 For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

Back to the story...

**34** *Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me."*

- The conversation expands beyond the inner circle – all are invited to listen. This is no secret.
- The gospel is good news, but its believers will encounter hard realities. If Jesus followers want to experience *life*, a sort of death must precede it.
- This phrase “take up your cross, and follow me” might be familiar to some of us, but it’s the first time we find a mention of crucifixion in Mark, and it’s jaw dropping.
- Crosses were symbols of loss, defeat, shame, horror. They weren’t decorative, polished or pleasant. They were the opposite. Nobody hung them on their walls or around their necks. Jesus says that following him means challenge, struggle, suffering, humility. Expect death, if you want life. Expect to feel like your losing, if you want to win. This is how the world was going to change.
- Before Jesus, before the cross, the world changed one way: by power and force. Influence meant strength and power meant exercising control. Jesus did things differently. He changed things by laying power to one side.
- To many, this sounded bonkers.
- There’s some ancient graffiti that depicts how Jesus’ contemporaries reacted to the cross and the first Christian’s new view of it.
- The cross is challenging. It was then and is now.
- One historian writes this:
  - “Archaeologists uncovered a piece of anti-Christian graffiti dating back to the second or third century, when large numbers of Christians were still being imprisoned and executed. The crude drawing shows a crucified man with a donkey’s head, indicating stupidity. Next to the cross stands a man with arm raised in adoration toward the figure on the cross, and below the image scribbled in very bad Greek are the words, ‘Alexamenos worships his god.’ The most plausible explanation of the graffiti imagines Roman guards taking perverse pleasure in deriding an incarcerated Christian named Alexamenos by depicting his “Lord” as a mule-headed loser. In an honour-shame culture what else could Jesus’ crucifixion have meant?” – John Dixon, *Humilitas*, Ch. 6.

- Crucifixion meant loss, humiliation, defeat. Jesus takes a symbol of defeat and turns it into a symbol of victory.
- It seems wrong, but it's right.
- Why does it feel wrong? Crucifixion hurts. Death is painful. If you want to win, why would you allow yourself to seemingly lose? If you want to live, why would you let yourself die?
- The *kind* of death Jesus says his followers must embrace isn't because God doesn't love people, or wants to punish them. It's just the opposite. This kind of death, according to Jesus, is the way to true life.
- Consider Jesus' words again, *you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*
- What dies when we follow Jesus on the path of the cross? *Selfish ways.* Pride, arrogance, needing to get your own way, hatred, greed. The opposite of Jesus' way – love, sacrifice and humility.
- The more selfish and prideful we are, the more arrogant and greedy we live, the more we need to get our own way... the more following Jesus is going to hurt, because those things on the way of the cross will die. But that's okay, this death gives way to real life.
- Aside: Jesus goes first, leadership means going first. If we want to lead like Jesus that will mean love manifesting itself in practical sacrifice and humility. That will mean not always getting our way, not acting arrogantly, being willing to serve other's interests rather than our own.
- Jesus elaborates...

*35 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. 36 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? 37 Is anything worth more than your soul?*

- According to Jesus, trying to control, consolidate power, be our own gods, *hanging on* to our lives will ultimately mean the loss of them.

- Giving life over to God in submission, sacrifice and humility will mean he'll guide his followers in *his way of life* and show them how to truly be like him - experiencing life as he first intended it.
- What are we holding onto?
  - What argument or debate do we *have* to win?
  - What way of our own do we *have* to get?
  - What personal perspective or agenda *must* we inflict on others?
  - What selfish, self-serving attitude brings more fulfillment and joy than what Jesus offers?
- A Christian lets these things die, and chooses the way of the cross – the way of love, humility and sacrifice... and in doing so, they find life.

**38** *If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*

**9** *Jesus went on to say, "I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!"*

- Jesus draws the line in the sand. We've got to make a choice.
- If we choose to follow him, we'll experience life and see things that we'd never be able to if our head were buried in the sands of selfishness and pride.

#### Discussion Questions:

- How has your understanding of being a Christian changed as you've gotten to know Jesus better?
- What has been challenging about following Jesus? What has been encouraging?
- What speaks to you from this passage? What challenges you?
- What needs to change in your life after considering these words from Jesus?