

Finer Grounds

Mark Lesson 7: Jesus' Death Predicted

Before You Begin:

Mark 8:29 is one of the most pivotal verses in Mark's entire gospel account. Just as in the first century, there are many theories concerning the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Who do you say that he is? How would you back up your claim to an unbeliever?

This passage is a critical moment in Mark's gospel account. Up until this point Jesus has been teaching and doing miracles, trying to demonstrate exactly who and what he was. And now, Peter proclaims that he IS the Christ! The next several chapters will focus on Jesus' efforts to teach the apostles exactly what it means that he is the Christ. We will walk with Jesus and his apostles as he tries to prepare them for what is coming, as they despair after his death, and as Satan is forever conquered through the glorious resurrection!

Read Mark 8:27-30

This passage opens with Jesus taking his apostles away from the crowds for more one-on-one instruction. His ministry is nearing an end, and it is vital that the apostles begin to truly understand who he is, and what his purpose is on earth.

Think About It:

Why did those in the first century find it easier to believe that Jesus was a re-incarnated prophet than the Messiah?

Why do people today find it easier to believe that he was simply another prophet rather than the Messiah?

Read Mark 8:31-8:33

In verse 31 Jesus gives a clear outline of his purpose: #1 to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, #2 to be killed, and #3 to rise again after three days. He is explaining things to his apostles in the clearest way he can. Note #1, this list is exhaustive and includes everyone the apostles have been taught to listen to and respect their entire lives, and now Jesus is telling them that those are the very men who will reject his ministry and have him killed.

It is also interesting to note that Jesus chose this time to describe himself as the "Son of Man." This particular phrasing really denotes the fact that Jesus will suffer all of these things as a human man (Orbison & Petrillo 2004). And then Peter, immediately after declaring Jesus the Christ, takes him aside to rebuke him.

Jesus' phrasing here is very strong. He is leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that what

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Peter has just said is completely unacceptable. I cannot imagine how devastated Peter must have been, and how it must have hurt Jesus to hurt Peter in this way, yet that was how important Jesus' message was.

Think About It:

Why did the apostles struggle so much to understand Jesus' purpose on earth?

Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke him privately, but how did Jesus respond to Peter?

How does Jesus' statement in this specific situation of, "Get behind me Satan!" relate to Luke 4:1-13?

Do we let fear of hurting people prevent us from addressing sin as boldly as we should?

Read Mark 8:34-38

In verse 34 Jesus gives an outline of what it means to be a disciple (Orbison & Petrillo 2004): let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. We must first deny ourselves, meaning we must intentionally decide that Jesus will be the most important thing in our lives (more important than sports, hobbies, kid's activities, etc.). Then we must take up our cross. I believe in many ways modern American society has done great harm to this imagery. When we see "cross" we picture a pretty necklace that someone wears, or a

decorative wooden cutout on our walls. We must remember that in Jesus' day a cross was the opposite of a beautiful ornament, it was a symbol of the cruelest death ever known to mankind. My brother said it perfectly when he stated that, Biblically speaking, using a cross as a decoration is no different than wearing an electric chair on a chain. It is a symbol of death, of suffering, and of a punishment reserved for the worst of society. This is what we must embrace if we truly wish to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We must put our old self, and our selfish desires, on the cross, and decide that we will follow Christ daily regardless of the personal consequences. For some, this personal consequence has been, and will be, a physical death on this earth, yet this dedication to the cause of Christ is the only way to save our eternal souls (verses 35-37).

Jesus goes on in verse 38 to say that anyone who is ashamed of him, he will be ashamed of. Keep this passage in context, Jesus has just told them that he will be rejected by all of their leaders and those of authority, and he describes it as an, "adulterous and sinful generation." He knows that his disciples will be ridiculed, and possibly punished if they speak out for the cause of Christ, yet that is exactly what he expected them to do. Is our generation any different, and is his expectation of us any less?

Think About It:

Which of Jesus three descriptors of being a true disciple do you struggle with the most? How can you grow in that area?

What is the kingdom of God that Jesus speaks of in 9:1? (See Acts 2)

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Take Action:

Make a list of Jesus' "for" statements in this passage. What do you learn from these?

Read Mark 9:2-8

What an amazing passage! One of the most disappointing aspects of Scripture is that no one recorded for us exactly what Moses, Elijah and Jesus were saying to each other. The question of "why Moses and Elijah" is inevitable, and the simple answer is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets: Moses represents the law, Elijah the prophets (Lenski 1961). It is also intriguing to ask how Moses and Elijah were recognized by the apostles, but unfortunately Scripture does not provide a definitive answer to this question.

This is one of the few times that Jesus separates his apostles, taking with him only Peter, James and John. As the apostles look on, Jesus is transfigured into a being of radiance. Peter, once again, feels the need to speak up, only this time he is not as enlightened as when he proclaimed Jesus the Christ. Jesus does not even have an opportunity to respond before a voice comes from Heaven silencing Peter and demanding that they listen to Jesus.

Think About It:

What reason does Scripture give for Peter's proclamation to build three tabernacles? Do you or anyone you know feel a need to fill empty silences? What can we learn about this from Peter?

What in other instance in Scripture does a voice coming from Heaven and declaring Jesus' deity?

Read Mark 9:9-13

While we have often referred to the "Messianic Secret" in Mark, this is actually the only time that Jesus commands silence specifically regarding the fact that he is the Messiah (France 2002). Logically, the reason for this command for silence seems to be Jesus' overwhelming popularity at this point in time, and the people's expectation of an earthly Kingdom (France 2002). If the people had truly been convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he may have never been able to fulfill his destiny on the cross.

From 2,000 years later, Jesus' meaning here is obvious, but we must put ourselves in the apostles' shoes. For generations the Jews have been waiting for the Messiah, and now that he's here he says he's going to be killed? How could the Son of God be killed in the first place? If he were just going to be raised from the dead, why did he need to be killed? How was he going to be raised from the dead when he was the one with the power (Lenski 1961)? These are legitimate questions that the apostles would have struggled mightily with.

Think About It:

Jesus is still trying to prepare the apostles for their future role. What is the timeframe Jesus set on the apostles' silence?

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Who is Jesus referring to when he speaks of Elijah?

Take Action:

Sometimes we struggle with the lack of understanding that is seen in the Jews of Jesus' time and even in the apostles. To better understand the struggle that they had to do some research into what the Jews believed about the Messiah.

Read Mark 9:14-29

What an all-around horrible situation. The apostles have tried, and failed to heal this boy, the scribes are delighted at their failure and taking every opportunity to publicly ridicule them, they are trying to defend themselves and the name of Christ to the best of their ability, and the poor boy and his father are caught in the middle. Based on the conversation that comes next it's pretty safe to assume that the nine's pride had already taken quite a hit by not being invited to the party on the mountain, and this very publicly failure has done nothing to help. It is interesting to note, however, that the Scribes are amazingly quiet once Jesus himself arrives on the scene.

This next dialogue is one of the most beautiful conversations in Scripture. The father begs Jesus to help his son, if he can. Many people criticize this man for the word "if," however we need to keep in mind that Jesus' apostles, operating under his authority, have just failed. Jesus' response is that anything is possible for one who believes. At this point the man cries out, "I believe, help my unbelief!"

One important lesson we can learn from this is to be honest with the Almighty. I fear that oftentimes today's American Christian believes that Christianity means never doubting, never

wavering, and that's just not true. We can smile and be bubbly at worship services all we want, but God knows the doubt and fear that is in our heart at times. Denying these feelings will only make them fester, the only way to deal with them is as this father did, to pour them out to Jesus. The most healing, peace-bringing prayers I have ever spoken to my Heavenly Father went something like, "God, I know you are bigger than this. I know you have a plan, but I don't understand. I'm scared, I'm struggling, and I'm angry that this is happening." In effect, "I believe, help my unbelief." Jesus did not condemn this man for his doubt, he helped him overcome it, and healed his son.

Once they were alone inside the house, the apostles ask Jesus why they were unable to cast out the demon. Jesus' response is that that particular type of demon can only be cast out by prayer. One thing this tells us is that there are different types of demons, which is a pretty intriguing concept. Jesus' focus, however, is on prayer. It appears that the apostles were leaning on their own power to cast out the demon after their success when Jesus sent them out before, and when they met resistance, they gave up instead of praying for God to use them and give them the power they needed (Lenski 1961).

Think About It:

Do people use the failures of Christians today to slander the name of Christ? What does this mean for us as Christians?

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Have you ever felt as this father did? Do you now? How did you handle the situation? What can we learn from this father's open struggle with his faith?

Have you ever given up on something when the first time didn't go well? How does this fit with reliance on the Holy Spirit?

Take Action:

Resolve to do one thing that absolutely terrifies you. (For me, this was leading a song for our Ladies' Bible Class.) It can be teaching a Bible class, giving a lesson, leading a song or leading a prayer at a Ladies' Day or Ladies' Bible class, or inviting someone to study the Bible with you. Whatever it is that terrifies you, depend on the Lord to get you through it. (Don't be afraid to ask for help either, God gave us our brethren for a reason.)

Read Mark 9:30-32

Jesus is constantly reminding his apostles of what is coming in an effort to prepare them. He has told them often enough that, although they still do not fully understand, they understand enough that they are afraid to ask what he means. It is unclear whether their fear was due to the frustration Jesus showed when he learned of their failure, or a fear of what Jesus was saying.

Think About It:

Do we ever struggle with Scripture because we are afraid of the consequences for our lives? What do we do in these situations?

Read Mark 9:33-37

Who is the greatest? The apostles struggled with power and authority 2,000 years ago, and we as Christians still struggle with it today. When combined with Mark 10:35-45 it is possible that, at least to some extent, the apostles are understanding that Jesus' Kingdom is coming, and they want their "rightful" place when it does (France 2002). These feelings are probably exacerbated by the fact that Jesus did just single out three of the apostles while the others were left behind.

Some scholars believe that at this point the apostles were back in Mary's house (John 2:12) and that the child Jesus calls is actually a relative who knows and trusts Jesus (Lenski 1961). While today children are often doted on and catered to, in the first century (as in days past in American society) the elderly were honored, and children were among the least influential in society. Thus Jesus' point: if you want to be great, you must humble yourself to a lowly position.

Think About It:

How does this passage relate to I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9?

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What does Jesus' teaching about the least and greatest look like in the church today? Is this how it should look?

Take Action:

Find a task that you consider "lowly" and perform that task for two weeks thinking about how you are doing it to serve and honor God. Tell no one that you are doing it, keep it between you and God. Take notes on how your attitude towards performing that task is related to how much you are focusing on serving God.

Read Mark 9:38-41

This is one of the most fascinating and confusing passages in Mark's gospel account. The apostles are still nursing the wounds of their failure, when they come upon a man they don't even know successfully casting out demons in the name of Christ. Many theories have been thrown around concerning exactly who this man was and what he was doing, but the most logical I have found comes from the teachings of Lenski. Lenski maintains that this man, while not blessed to travel with Jesus, he had such faith in Jesus' abilities that he was able to cast out demons in Jesus' name. This is similar to what happened in Mark 5:34, Jesus did not directly or intentionally heal this woman, but she accessed his power through her tremendous faith. In this current situation, the man himself did not need healing, but he was helping those who did. This fits with Mark's typical style of pairing a lack of faith in the apostles with an act of tremendous faith by someone else.

Jesus' statement in verse 40 is equally powerful. There is no middle ground where Jesus the Christ is concerned. We are either actively

form him and proclaiming him, or we are against him. Which side of the fence do we fall on?

Think About It:

How do you personally proclaim Christ? How can you do better?

Take Action:

This week talk to at least one person about Jesus the Christ, and what he has done for you.

Read Mark 9:42-50

Jesus' teaching here should terrify us. As Christians, we are all an example, an ambassador, a teacher. The word here for "sin" is very strong. It goes beyond the idea of stumbling, which you can recover from, and actually means "full destruction" (Lenski 1961). Jesus is saying that if we cause a believer to lose their soul, we condemn ourselves. In Genesis 4:9 Cain asks God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is YES! While we are not directly responsible for another person's actions or decisions, I Timothy 4:12 tells us that we are to be an example and encouragement to the brethren. Galatians 6:1 tells us that if our brother is caught in sin, we are to strive to restore him in a spirit of gentleness. While we are not directly responsible for our brethren, we are responsible for our example, and the relationship we strive to have with our brethren.

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Think About It:

What example are you personally setting for the brethren? Who are you intentionally encouraging?

Take Action:

Do something specific to encourage at least one person this week. It can be as simple as sending them a card or telling them that you love and appreciate them, or something as elaborate as taking them out to eat. Let them know that they are loved and appreciated.

Mark 8:27-9:50 records a powerful, critical time in the life of Christ. His apostles have finally proclaimed him the Christ, and the time has come to prepare them for his death, burial, and resurrection. What will they do with the information Jesus has given them? What will we do with it?

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