

Sermon on Mark 8:31-38

John R. Collins — Draft 9 of Sunday, February 28, 2021

Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

SERMON

UPSET: It always catches me off guard how terse or perhaps even harsh Jesus was with Peter in this passage. Calling Peter "Satan" was no small thing.

DEEPENING: After all, Peter was just trying to look out for Jesus. (Matthew 16:22: Peter said, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.") But maybe his words were a temptation. Perhaps that's why Jesus was so harsh.

In one of the profound paradoxes of the Christian faith, Jesus was fully divine, but also fully human, he shared in both God's divinity and our human limitations which means he was really tempted. As Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Frederick Buechner thinks that Jesus spent the forty days in the wilderness figuring out what exactly it meant to be the Messiah. Perhaps it was in the wilderness that he discerned the role he had to play. That is "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... , and be killed."

Jesus accepted suffering and death because the only way to save us was to take the evil, sin and death of this world upon himself and exhaust and thus destroy them.

What Jesus did had to be done, but that doesn't mean he was looking forward to it.

In order for him to freely give his life, he had to be free to not give it. He could have said no. And that's what made Peter's "this must never happen to you Lord" such a dangerous temptation.

Since even Christ suffered, it should come as no surprise that we must suffer as well. Jesus himself says that we must take up our crosses and follow him.

Our crosses have to be Christ shaped. The cross is not just any hardship, but a result of the fact that we're following Jesus Christ. A cross is something we could avoid, a difficulty we could evade if we weren't faithfully following Jesus.

To be clear: we are not called to seek out a cross, we don't choose our sufferings anymore than Jesus chose his, but if we choose faithfulness, a cross will probably find us.

But, even if a cross doesn't find us, we must also endure the regular sufferings of this world as well. (Things like sickness, disease, anxiety, depression, loss, and grief.) It won't be this way forever, but it was that way for Jesus' and it is still that way for us now.

With or without a cross thrust upon us, suffering is part of life.

SUDDEN SHIFT/GOSPEL: That's where the passion prediction that was a scandal to Peter can be a comfort to us. We have a Lord and Savior who knows suffering and is acquainted with grief. When we suffer, when we grieve, when we're anxious, Jesus knows first hand what we're going through.

UNPACKING: Christ's presence helps us endure and remain faithful. Even ordinary sufferings can be endured in a manner befitting a Christian. As John Wesley said

"The best of all is, God is with us."

Amen.

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