

A WINTER BIBLE STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Tuesday April 20, 2021: Session 8 - Readings

Judea & Samaria: "Jesus Foretells His Death I, II & III"

Mark 8:31-10:52

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

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. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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."

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. 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. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 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."

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

The Transfiguration

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter

1. Background: The Transfiguration

The climactic event on the mountain revealed Jesus's divine nature in a physically changed and glorified manner. Some key observations about this impressive moment will help us understand why Mark (and Matthew and Luke) felt it significance enough to include in their stories.

Notice that God spoke, much like he did at Jesus's baptism. His words are almost identical:

Baptism: *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*

Transfiguration: *This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*

The audience has changed. Whereas the Father was speaking to his Son during his baptism, he was speaking to the disciples at the Transfiguration. He confirmed Jesus's identity and commanded obedience to him. "Listen" implies action.

Who attended the Transfiguration? Other than Jesus and his three disciples, we learn that Moses and Elijah appeared in a transfigured state. Moses, the author of the Torah, had long represented the Law. In fact, we still call those first five books of the Bible "the Law of Moses." When teachers would proclaim, "Moses said," they would be quoting from the Law.

Likewise, Elijah represented the prophets, that other collection of Hebrew scripture that, along with the Law and Writings, completed the Hebrew Bible. In meeting with Elijah and Moses, Jesus demonstrated his superiority to them: his teaching fulfilled theirs perfectly, his coming sacrifice would supplant the old way of the Law, and he was the prophet predicted in Deuteronomy 18:18.

At the transfiguration the glory of the preincarnate Son of God temporarily broke through the limitations of his humanity. In this appearance, Jesus confirmed Peter's verbal proclamation that he was the Messiah. Peter was obviously overwrought watching this scene unfold. He saw Jesus in a completely different way.

said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The Coming of Elijah

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him. He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.” He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you are

able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!” After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand. When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

Who Is the Greatest?

Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

Another Exorcist

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever

gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

Temptations to Sin

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

“For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Teaching about Divorce

He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another

commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Jesus Blesses Little Children

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

The Rich Man

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has

left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death & Resurrection

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”

The Request of James and John

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,

and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

1. Peek at the Greek: diakonos (διάκονος)

While describing his expectations for great disciples, Jesus uses two words in Mark 10:43–44. The first appears in verse 43 and is translated “*servant*.” It’s the Greek word *diakonos*, where we get our English “*deacon*” from. If the disciples want to be great, they must be a servant. The word implies the idea of a higher-powered servant in a household—one who might even be an administrator. It may not be the lordly position the disciples were after, but it’s not a terrible substitute. But then Jesus chooses a different word to drive his point home in verse 44. There, he says the first in the kingdom must be the *doulos*, or “*slave*,” of all. Unlike a servant, a slave in those days had no standing and no rights. He or she was subject entirely to the whims of his or her master. If the disciples wanted to be first, they would have to submit not just to Jesus but to each other.

A favorite term in modern Christian writing is servant leader. It’s a popular way of describing how one should lead—with the manner of a servant. But what if we focused on the servant part alone, without the leadership aspect? How would that change your attitude toward following Christ?

BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The Heart of the Matter – Being a Christian: 8:34-9:1

By: Richard I. Deibert; Interpretation Bible Studies: Mark

As Jesus rebukes the disciples, He turns to include the crowd in His Revelation about being the Christian. We have already noted the irony of this – for the Christians, Jesus clarifies the Christ; but for the non-Christians, Jesus clarifies the Christian – and have suggested that Jesus’ agenda collapses with the disciples’ impenetrableness. In frustration, Jesus openly shares the conversation with everyone, hoping that some will have eyes to see and ears to hear (Mark 8:14-21); “If anyone wills to follow after me....” (Mark 8:34)

These words of Jesus are often quoted. Perhaps no teaching of His is as sheared into pieces as this one. But we must hold it together. Having just defined the ‘Christ’, Jesus now defines the ‘Christian’. “A disciples,” says Jesus, “is one who denies, takes up, and follows.” (Others) caution against viewing this singular, threefold definition as three distinct definitions, “the threefold condition of discipleship... is a single condition, for the first two terms define and specify the third.” Self-denial and Cross-bearing together constitute obedient discipleship.

Turning to the one congregation of crowd and disciples, Jesus clarifies that a Christian is one who *wills* to be a Christian. Recall the example of the blind man from Bethsaida – a seeing person is one who *wills* to use the gift of sight to see. In other words, being a Christian involves willful activity; it is not a status magically conferred by parents or even baptism. This is why the concept ‘Christian’ throughout the New Testament is almost exclusively verbal. The noun “Christian” occurs only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and 1 Peter 4:16). Usually the New Testament references the followers of Christ by a description of their active faithfulness.

Jesus then issues three successive commands, which together make up the most concise definition of being ‘Christian’ in the entire New

Testament: deny yourself, take up your Cross, and start walking. Let us examine Jesus’ personal understanding of discipleship. We shall focus on what Williamson calls the two terms of discipleship, self-denial and Cross-bearing.

What does Jesus mean when He commands all would-be followers, “Deny yourself”? The word behind “deny” is a Greek word that Mark uses only here and in 14:30 to describe Peter’s crushing denial of Jesus Christ (“I truly tell you, this day; this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will *deny* me three times”; Mark 14:30). The Greek word for ‘deny’ can be translated as “disown” or “renounce claim to”, connoting an intentional act of disassociation from a particular relationship: “have nothing more to do with.” Mark’s reserved use of this word is provocative. Could he be suggesting that being a Christian involves denying self, yet even the most forthright of Christians (Peter) could still deny Jesus Christ? Could Mark be suggesting that Christian willfulness remain humble, aware that even the most intimately related and right confessing Christian is subject to betrayal?

As we struggle with the notion of self-denial, we must confess that this imperative has been mishandled in three disastrous ways. First, some have used Jesus’ definition of ‘Christian’ for a sociological purpose, to keep folk in their place. For example, Christian slaves, battered housewives, and persons battling depression have, at times, been exhorted to accept their reality, to deny themselves, and to remain as they are. Second, some have used Jesus’ definition of ‘Christian’ for a materialistic purpose; to get folk to share their stuff. For example, preachers have found self-denial especially convenient during the annual stewardship campaign. Third, some have used Jesus’ definition of ‘Christian’ for a psychological purpose; to coax folk to disown themselves. For example, a pastoral counselor who is personally opposed to women in ministry might counsel a woman to deny herself and her sense of God’s call to ordained ministry.

All of these interpretations of self-denial misconstrue the Christian faith! The whole purpose of Jesus Christ is to redeem and to fulfill our humanity. Whatever Jesus means by denying self should not be construed to denying humanity: Quite the contrary; Jesus’ command to

deny self is Jesus' prescription for *fulfilling* humanity. Furthermore, while Jesus' command to deny self indeed has a severe bearing on our materialism (which degrades humanity), we must not reduce self-denial to an imperative against possessing some thing.

Jesus does not command us to distance ourselves from a relationship with something or someone else, but instead to disassociate ourselves from a *particular relationship we have with ourselves*. Jesus knows that if a disciple wants to be the line-leader the line will never get to Jerusalem. So He states the Christian faith conditionally: "If anyone wills to follow behind me; he or she must remain behind me!" Williamson agrees: "The way of Jesus... [is] a denial of the grasping self to liberate the greater one." Said another way, "You must rearrange your relationship with your self so that you self does not Lord you, but allows me (Christ) to be your Lord."

The second term of discipleship is Cross-bearing. What does Jesus mean when He commands all of us would-be Christians, "Pick up your Cross"? Once again, the Church has at times fallen prey to temptation and used Jesus' crisp definition to convince us that our Cross is whatever ill-fated circumstance or affliction we find ourselves in at the moment. For some; carrying our Cross has been equated with bearing a cancer diagnosis bravely or keeping the attitudinal chin up in the face of racism.

As painful as those circumstances are, they miss the impact of the phrase. This is not what the Cross meant in the ancient world. and this cannot be what Jesus defines as the core of Christian discipleship. The Cross was a particularly ghoulish form of capital punishment reserved for persons who committed a crime against the Roman state. When Jesus defines the Christian disciple as one who picks up his or her Cross, He is saying that the disciples must fully bear the cost of doing God's will. The Cross for the disciple is identical to the Cross for Jesus in that it is the *consequence* (not the condition) of righteousness. The Cross is what Jesus Christ was forced to bear for doing God's will.

The rightness or wrongness of the Cross, as we are nailed to it, is not the issue. Is it not remarkable that Jesus refuses to quarrel with His prosecutors, despite their glaring injustice? He just quietly takes up the

horridly unjust Cross that is laid upon Him by the Roman-Jewish conspiracy. And He makes it clear that a disciple will do likewise. A disciple will do the will of God at all costs and will accept (pick up) the consequences (Cross) that result from his or her right behaviour. Jesus is warning the Church that doing God's will sometime has capital consequences, but that disciples will not permit consequences to divert them from the mission of righteousness.

Jesus knows the fearsome force of His teaching about discipleship, and so closes the conversation with a word of encouragement. He declares that discipleship is worth the cost because you will discover life that is more valuable than the cost. In effect, Jesus exhorts the Church, "You need not be afraid or ashamed of being my disciple! You need not be afraid or ashamed of being emphatic about the will of God! you need not be afraid or ashamed of being capitally punished for doing what is right or good or true. In this you will discover your true humanity. In losing you life, you will gain life that is priceless and permanent. Be not afraid. Get behind me, and follow."

Puzzling Points:

(M. A. P. Making the Bible Meaningful, Accessible, Practical; by Nick Page)

Some people will die....

In Mark 9:1, Jesus states that some people will not die before they see the kingdom of God come in power. Various interpretations have been put forward for what Jesus means. Some argue that it means His transfiguration, or that it refers to His resurrection, or even the descent of the Holy Spirit as depicted in Acts. However, the fact that Jesus implies that some people will be dead when it comes may point to an event further in the future – perhaps the spread and effectiveness of the early Church.

Who is the greatest? (Mark 9:33-37)

People's inability to escape from the standard view of the Messiah is shown in the next episode, where the disciples argue about which of them is the greatest. Jesus overturns their idea of greatness – just as His 'Messiah' was the exact opposite of the one they imagined. In His kingdom, it is those who serve who have true greatness – an

idea that He was to demonstrate in action on the eve of His Crucifixion. Unless we have the same attitude as children – humble, trusting, not ambitious or arrogant – we will never enter Christ’s kingdom.

For and Against... (Mark 9:38-41)

It was not only the disciples and Jesus Himself who were performing miracles. Here we have an account of an independent exorcist, but one who is working in Christ’s name. The disciples try to stop him, because he is not one of the ‘official’ followers. Jesus is not interested in forming some kind of exclusive club. Anyone who had faith in His name is on His side.

They had discussed with one another who was the greatest

By: servantoftheword.org

Meditation: Whose glory do you seek? There can be no share in God's glory without the cross. When Jesus prophesied his own betrayal and crucifixion, it did not make any sense to his disciples because it did not fit their understanding of what the Messiah came to do. And they were afraid to ask further questions! Like a person who might receive a bad verdict from the doctor and then refuse to ask further questions, they, too, didn't want to know any more. How often do we reject what we do not wish to see? We have heard the good news of God's word and we know the consequences of accepting it or rejecting it. But do we give it our full allegiance and mold our lives according to it? Ask the Lord to fill you with his Holy Spirit and to inspire within you a reverence for his word and a readiness to obey it.

How ashamed the disciples must have been when Jesus overheard them arguing about who among them was the greatest! But aren't we like the disciples? We compare ourselves with others and desire their praise. The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody"? Even the psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us. *“You have made them a little*

lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5). Jesus made a dramatic gesture by embracing a child to show his disciples who really is the greatest in the kingdom of God. What can a little child possibly teach us about greatness? Children in the ancient world had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. They were socially at the "bottom of the rung" and at the service of their parents, much like the household staff and domestic servants. What is the significance of Jesus' gesture? Jesus elevated a little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honor. It is customary, even today, to seat the guest of honor at the right side of the host. Who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble and lowly of heart — who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant or child.

Jesus, himself, is our model. He came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Paul the Apostles states that Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). Jesus lowered himself (he whose place is at the right hand of God the Father) and took on our lowly nature that he might raise us up and clothe us in his divine nature. *“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”*(James 4:6). If we want to be filled with God's life and power, then we need to empty ourselves of everything which stands in the way — pride, self-seeking glory, vanity, etc. God wants empty vessels so he can fill them with his own glory, power, and love (2 Cor. 4:7). Are you ready to humble yourself and to serve as Jesus did?

“Lord, by your cross you have redeemed the world and revealed your glory and triumph over sin and death. May I never fail to see your glory and victory in the cross. Help me to conform my life to your will and to follow in your way of holiness.”

(Source: <https://dailyscripture.servantsoftheword.org/readings/mark9v30.htm>)