

The Way of the Cross

Mark 8:31-9:1

Mark's Gospel hinges on Peter's confession about Jesus: "You are the Messiah" (8:29). Jesus has dealt with the attacking blindness of the Pharisees. Now he addresses the supportive blindness of the disciples—everyone sees what they want to. It's time for the veil to be lifted. Jesus is setting out for Jerusalem and wants to take the disciples with him, and for them to remain after his death. Only by embracing the way of the cross can they (and we) follow him. This text describes the meaning of the Messiah--what Jesus came to do, how we are called to imitate him, and the wonderful result when we do.

The Necessity of the Cross

Jesus keys off Peter's recognition. He is the Messiah and the Son of Man, but before he frees the nation from oppression, comes to the Ancient of Days, and establishes his worldwide kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14), he *must* suffer, be rejected, and die (v31). He says this *plainly* (v32). Jesus isn't offering one among many ways to atone for sin. His suffering and death is strictly necessary to fulfill God's justice. We might not think we like the idea of God's judgment, but in every story where the villain is stopped we cheer—we just never see ourselves as the villain. When compared to God's standard, not our neighbor, we deserve the wage of sin which is death. In the cross we not only see the justice of God, but also his conquering love. Wrath fell on Jesus so we who trust in him would be justified (Rom. 3:26).

The Call of the Cross

Jesus' teaching about his death was offensive to Peter and the disciples (v32) because it sounded like a quarterback huddling his team at halftime to plan their own defeat. Failed "messiahs" always died trying (cf. Acts 5:35-38). Had Peter thought and listened more carefully, he would have remembered John the Baptizer and heard the part about resurrection. Jesus already rejected fulfillment, power and glory without suffering offered to him by the devil (Matt. 4:1-11). Peter wants him to have the crown without the cross. Do we? Prosperity theology isn't just bad; it's satanic (v33). Jesus' call is total and far steeper than Pascal's wager or any get-out-of-Hell-free-card approach to the Christian life. He gives three commands for *anyone* who wants to follow him: 1) deny yourself; 2) take up your cross; 3) follow me (v34).

The Result of the Cross

The description of following Jesus thus far would make you think the Christian life is the most miserable on earth. But in God's paradoxical world, it is the best. Those who clutch at their life—rights, privileges, power, prestige—lose it, but those who give their life away for Jesus and the gospel, save it (v35). The alternative is insane, like cutting out your tongue in exchange for delicious food (vv36-37). To take up the cross means we have been freed from shame and don't care what people think of Jesus or us for following him. Others avoid the shame of the world now but will face the shame of Jesus later (v38). The kingdom has been present in Mark's Gospel, and those who have taken up the cross, see it come. Some would see it come with power either at Pentecost in A.D. 33 or at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (9:1; cf. Matt. 10:21-23; Matt. 24:3). The way of the cross isn't a life of sadness and defeat. It's God's means of using and shaping us to proclaim his glorious gospel, and to enjoy all the triumph and beauty of God's kingdom. Even unto death.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 8:31-9:1 *31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." 34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." 1 And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."*

1. Why does Peter rebuke (!) Jesus, and what does Jesus call him (verses 31-33)?
2. Jesus tells his disciples if anyone would follow him he must do what three things (verse 34).
3. Jesus teaches many wonderfully surprising things called paradoxes ("pear-uh-dockses"). A paradox seems like it can't be true, but it is. Here's one of Jesus': "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Can you find another one in verse 35? Can you think of your own paradox?
4. Draw a picture of Peter rebuking Jesus, and Jesus waiting patiently for him for him to finish!

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. --Mark 8:35