

It Doesn't Get Any Clearer

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Mark 8:31-33

Last week in our study, Jesus drew a line in the sand concerning His identity. Upon entering the villages of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ" Mark 8:27–29. The word "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ (Anointed One). In our text this morning, Jesus will begin to explain what that means. As we'll see, Jesus' explanation results in bewilderment and dismay, not only because of the implications for Messiahship but equally because of its implications for discipleship.¹ Let's turn our attention to the text before us this morning. Mark, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

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. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 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." Mark 8:31–33

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

I. THE REVELATION (v.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.

Mark begins verse 31 saying, "And He began to teach them..." This marks a turning point to new content in Jesus' teaching. Three times in Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to suffer, be killed, and rise from the dead. We'll see the first in our text this morning and the second two in the weeks to come.

¹ James R Edwards, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002),

He was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him. Mark 9:31–32

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he 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 delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." Mark 10:32–34

Without a doubt, when Jesus spoke of a Messiahship connected with suffering and death, His statements were incomprehensible to the disciples. If Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), the Son of Man, why would he be rejected and killed by Israel's religious leaders? Keep in mind that the disciples have an Old Testament tape reel playing in their mind. That tape reel is reminding them that the Old Testament Scriptures promised a Messiah that would defeat Israel's enemies and set up a new kingdom where He would rule. As the disciples were trying to connect the dots in their feeble minds, they just couldn't see how their Old Testament view of the Messiah was going to mesh with Jesus' statement that He would be killed at the hands of the religious leaders.

Consider Isaiah 9:6-7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Consider Daniel 7:13-14

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

We should note that many of the Old Testament prophets had written concerning the Lord's Suffering Servant. Consider Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, for instance. Isaiah's words are familiar to most of us, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has

borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" Isaiah 53:3-5.

The problem is that, up to this point, there is no evidence that the Suffering Servant spoken of in the Old Testament was ever connected with the Messiah in Jewish minds. But much more had been written about the Messiah's glory. This is what led to the disconnect in the disciples' minds. When Jesus finally speaks about His Messianic status and impending death, He didn't claim the common understanding but rather redefined it practically beyond recognition. What the disciples didn't understand is that glory would come through suffering. To be sure, there is a lot we need to learn when it comes to understanding glory through suffering. The cross comes before the crown. It was true for Jesus and it's true for us as well.

SON OF MAN

This expression has appeared only twice before in Mark (cf. 2:10, 28). Both times Mark used it to emphasize a hugely important facet of Jesus' ministry. We see it first when Jesus healed the paralytic. Jesus said, "But that you may know that the *Son of Man* has authority on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the paralytic - "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home" Mark 2:10-11. It appears for the second time just a little later in chapter 2 where Jesus, speaking of the Sabbath, says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the *Son of Man* is Lord even of the Sabbath" Mark 2:27-28.

The title, Son of Man, was especially suited Jesus' total mission. It was free of political connotations, which helped alleviate any false expectations. At the same time, it was rather ambiguous (like a parable) to preserve the balance between concealment and disclosure in Jesus' life and mission. Perhaps most importantly, it combined the elements of suffering and glory in a way no other designation could. It served to define Jesus' unique role as the Messiah. We will see this title again in the other two predictions of Jesus' death (cf. Mark 9:31, 10:28).

"MUST" HE DIE?

Notice Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things..." The word "must" is the Greek verb, δεῖ. It means that something is "binding," "necessary," "proper," or "inevitable." It communicates compulsion. In this case, it refers to Jesus' compulsion to God's divine plan for His Messianic mission (cf. Mark 14:35-36). It also communicates Jesus' perfect submission to God's divine will. Jesus is communicating the *necessity* of the cross. Because God is love and man is a sinner, God will provide a salvation for him. But because God is also just, it is necessary for Christ to die on the cross and pay the penalty that satisfies the demands of the very justice which required that sin be paid for.

Four things stand out in the foretelling of Jesus' suffering. One is that He is going to die. Second, this death is intentional. He intends it. He means for it to happen. He is not running from it, but walking into it. Third, it will not be suicide; it will be murder. Fourth, He will rise from the dead. Not at some uncertain time in the future like us, but precisely in three days. His death is appointed and his resurrection is appointed. They will happen on schedule.²

SUFFER MANY THINGS, BE REJECTED, AND BE KILLED

The word rejected is the Greek verb, (ἀποδοκιμάζω - apodokimazō). It means to "reject upon trial," to be "disallowed a claim," or "declared useless." The prefix ἀπο means "off" or "away from." The compound verb means to reject a person after having put a person to the test for the purpose of approving him. The religious leaders of Israel put Jesus to the test for the purpose of approving Him as Messiah, but He didn't meet their approval. Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah the Jews wanted. They wanted a military leader who would come in and liberate them from the oppressive rule of Rome. They weren't looking for a Savior who would free them from their bondage to sin.

THE WHY BEHIND THE WHAT

We know what is going to happen to Jesus. We know that He, the innocent, will suffer at the hands of evil men, will be killed (crucified), and will rise again. By why? Isn't there another way? Isn't there an alternate ending possible, like in some books? The answer is there isn't another way. There isn't another ending. Jesus came to die. He came to be the slain Savior. He came to be the murdered mediator. He came to be the assassinated advocate. He came to be the lynched lamb. He came to be the crucified Christ. Mark gives us the "why" behind the "what" in Mark 10:45. In His own words Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus came to be a ransom. He came to purchase sinners.

ARE YOU A PART OF THE MANY?

Friends, let me ask you a sobering question: Are you among the "many"? Are you ransomed? Have you been set free from the bondage of sin and guilt and condemnation and wrath? Who are the ransomed? Are you one of them? You can be. That's what the rest of verses 34–38 (we'll study those in three weeks) are about.

² John Piper, Mark 8:31-33 *The Son of Man Must Suffer Many Things*, March 28, 2010.

II. THE REBUKES (v.32-33)

A. Peter Rebukes Jesus (v.32)

And he said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

What does it mean when Mark notes, “And He said this plainly?” It means that Jesus held nothing back. He wasn’t speaking in parables. He wasn’t speaking to His disciples using hints or veiled allusions. This is the way Jesus had spoken to His disciples earlier. You might remember back to Mark 2:19-20 when Jesus was asked why His disciples didn't fast like John’s disciples or the disciples of the Pharisees. Jesus responded by saying, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.” The word Mark uses is (παρρησία - parrēsia). It means that Jesus now spoke clearly, openly, frankly, unmistakably, and boldly about His death. Not only did Jesus now speak about His death openly, but the verb is in the imperfect tense (continual action). Jesus repeatedly, and in detail, spoke about his death.

Mark tells us that as a result of Jesus speaking plainly about his impending suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection, Peter, “Took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.” The verb here means to “take” and the added prefix means to “face”. In other words, Peter took Jesus aside for face-to-face conversation. Peter clearly understood Jesus’ words in v.31, but could not reconcile his view of “Messiah” (v.29b) with the suffering and death Jesus predicted. So Peter began to rebuke Jesus for this supposed “defeatist” thinking.

This is a lesson to us all that when we argue with God’s Word, we open the door for Satan’s lies.³ Now, we need to be clear about the fact that while Peter’s rebuke of Jesus was a display of ignorance, it was deeply rooted in his love for Jesus. These men had come to love the carpenter from Nazareth who called them to leave their fishing nets and follow Him (cf. Mark 1:17).

Though they didn't understand everything about Jesus’ redemptive purpose and plan, they had been with Him long enough to know that whatever happened to Him was sure to happen to them as well. If there was suffering and death in Jesus’ future then there was suffering and death in the disciples future. Jesus told these fellas early on, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” Luke 9:23. Just a few chapters later in John’s gospel Jesus said, “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me” John 15:20-21. Jesus’ disciples didn't understand the relationship between the cross and the crown.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Matthew – Galatians vol.1* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1989), 139.

They were following Satan's philosophy (glory without suffering) instead of God's philosophy (Suffering transformed into glory). Friends, which philosophy you subscribe to will determine how you live and how you serve.⁴

We must not too quickly condemn Peter for His outburst of poor perspective. Have there not been times when we too have questioned God's way of working and suggested to him another way that lines up closer to our way of thinking? We cannot afford to criticize Peter. Jesus, usually so gentle and patient with his disciples, was very outspoken on this occasion.

Jesus is saying, "Peter, if you resist my plan to die, you resist God. You side with Satan against God. Satan doesn't want me dead, because he wants you in Hell. Satan wants me to bow down and worship him and jump off temples for fame and turn stones into bread for self-preservation. The last thing he wants is for a ransom to be paid for his captives. But that's what God wants, Peter, because, He loves you. My coming to die as your ransom is the love of God."⁵

B. Jesus rebukes Peter (v.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."

Notice that Jesus focuses His attention not only on Peter, but the rest of the disciples as well. Mark notes, "[Jesus], turning and seeing His disciples..." Why isn't Jesus only addressing Peter? The reason Jesus didn't exclusively address Peter is because the rest of the disciples agreed with Peter's assessment that Jesus' statement concerning His death was preposterous. Peter said what the rest of the disciples were thinking. But Jesus isn't going to let their improper thinking ride unchecked. Jesus rebukes Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

This was not a personal attack. The words, "Get behind me," are literally, "Go away behind (after) Me." Jesus' words hark back to His temptation in the wilderness. Remember, in Matthew 4, Satan tempted Jesus when he took him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Satan said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve"" Matthew 4:8-10. What was taking place here? Satan was tempting Jesus to sidestep the cross and instead receive rulership of the kingdom from the hand of Satan. Here, In Mark 8, Satan is using the key leader of the disciples to again try and sidestep the cross.

⁴ Wiersbe, 140.

⁵ Piper.

Here is a question worth pondering. Was Jesus calling Peter, Satan? I don't believe that's what we see taking place. Instead, I think Jesus is recognizing the source of Peter's words. I think Jesus is speaking directly to the Tempter. Mark uses the same word, (ἐπιτιμάω - *epitimaō*), which means "rebuke," that he used when Jesus rebuked the demons in Mark 1:25, 3:12. Words like Peter's, trying to turn Jesus aside from the cross, show Satan's thoughts, not God's. This was the temptation that Jesus had faced and conquered in the wilderness and would conquer again at Gethsemane.⁶

SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS ABOVE

There are times when we, like Peter, need a strong rebuke. This is especially true when we think we are convinced we are right but we are really wrong. In this moment, Peter's thinking wasn't focused on the things of God, His ways and purposes (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9), but on the things of men, human values and viewpoints. Peter is thinking on a human level, not God's level. Man's way of thinking is glory, wealth, comfort, success, winning, healing, pain-free living. But the way to Messianic glory is through suffering! That's what they missed. And without the suffering and paying for sin, there would be no kingdom! We have to ask ourselves, "Am I thinking God's way here, or man's way?" Every day we have that choice. God's way isn't the easy way, but it's the right way. Man's way leads to death; God's way to life.⁷

CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction as we bring our corporate worship to a close this morning. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our Salvation says, "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. And all God's people said, "Amen!" Go in peace!

⁶ Alan Cole, *Mark*, ed. D. A Carson et al., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 963.

⁷ Ernie Godshall.