

Net•Work Notes

Week 9, Day 1: Christ—Bearing the Cross

Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. As they walked, he asked, "Who do the people say I am?" "Some say 'John the Baptizer,'" they said. "Others say 'Elijah.'" Still others say 'one of the prophets.'" He then asked, "And you—what are you saying about me? Who am I?" (Mark 8:27-30)

The Personal Question

Sooner or later we come to the heart of the matter: Who do we think Jesus is? Jesus called disciples to follow him and, in following him, to get to know him. Jesus spent time teaching the disciples about God's work in the world ("the kingdom of God"). He used parables in order to engage their hearts and imaginations and to break through popular, entrenched ideas about God's ways. He taught them that God's rule was entering the world like seed planted in the soil, working its way silently, but steadily. He compared God's kingdom to a valuable pearl that a person would sell all to acquire. He let them know that God's reign could not be bought or earned but needed to be received as a child receives a gift.

But Jesus did more than teach. He demonstrated the kingdom's power. We have already talked about how God's power for healing was released in Jesus ministry. The people of God had looked forward to a time when God would free his people and bring blessing into their lives and to the community. Jesus announced that he was the one who was anointed to "bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4.18-19).

Jesus' teaching and ministry were so surprising that people wondered about the authority of his teaching. Was it from God? That question is as real today as it was when it was asked nearly 2000 years ago. Christians are people who have met Jesus, listened to his teachings, and decided that Jesus taught and acted in the power of God: we believe Jesus was God's anointed one (the word 'Christ' means anointed one, and anointed one means God's chosen king).

That does not mean that disciples do not have questions about Jesus and his ministry or what it means to follow him! We can say, "Jesus, I believe you are God's anointed one" and still not understand everything he is doing. But that is why he calls us to be followers—so that we can learn who he is and how he lives as we watch and listen.

What about you? What do you know and believe about Jesus? If you did not do this last week, write down your thoughts about Jesus.

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Week 9, Day 2: Christ—Bearing the Cross

Peter gave the answer: "You are the Christ, the Messiah."

Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive." He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it. But Peter grabbed him in protest...

An Ordeal of Suffering

All the gospels agree that Jesus decided to take his mission, his ministry to Jerusalem, the center of Israel's life. And Jesus was clear that to go to Jerusalem meant that he would suffer at the hands of the reigning powers of the day.

Jesus called the people back to God, but there were already leaders in Israel: the Sadducees and Pharisees among them. They, too, had ideas about how Israel should be led and the best way to live as God's people. Jesus came into conflict with Israel's leaders on many counts. They accused him of corrupting God's law (the Torah) and being a blasphemer for taking upon himself God-like power and authority. They explained his power to do miracles as evidence for his being in league with demonic powers. It is obvious, then, that there can be more than one answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" So, it is probably not surprising to you that the people you meet every day have a lot of opinions about who Jesus is.

The disciples themselves constantly misunderstood what Jesus was doing. Peter could not bear the declaration of Jesus that he would suffer and be killed in Jerusalem. He was imagining a different ministry of Jesus. He, like a lot of others, probably hoped that Jesus would call the

people to an uprising against Roman power that would drive the Romans out of Jerusalem and Israel, and establish Jesus as the King in the promised land.

But Jesus was informed by a different version of what it meant for God's anointed one to serve God. Read Isaiah 53. This is one example of another vision of the servant of the Lord.

Why do you think the people were disturbed by this vision of God's servant?

Why do you think the Jewish leaders rejected the claims and the works of Jesus?

What do you find most difficult to understand about the ministry of Jesus?

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Week 9, Day 3: Christ—Bearing the Cross

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 hands on them, and blessed them.

Jesus offered his life to us on the cross. We are sometimes mistaken in thinking that we have to earn God's approval. But the gospel tells a different story. As you read the gospels, when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God (or God's reign), he is always talking about what God is doing, not what we are doing. The kingdom of God is always something that is "entered" or "received". That does not mean that we can just sit back and wait to respond to God. But we cannot cause God's kingdom to come; we cannot force the action. In John's Gospel, when Jesus talked to Nicodemus, he told him about God's mysterious Spirit that works in the times and ways that we cannot predict.

Jesus continues to offer himself to people. Just as he called people to be his disciples, he now calls each and every one of us to follow him. Notice, that in the story about the children above, that the disciples have much to learn about "receiving" the kingdom. We tend to get sidetracked by what the world says is important. Things like little children get overlooked when we are on the busy road to success. But we soon learn that Jesus is teaching us to love and care for those whom the world overlooks.

So how do we receive the kingdom of God? Jesus is the one who brings the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is the

one who is the king of God's people. When we receive Jesus as the Lord over all our life (warts, wounds, weaknesses, and all!), we receive the kingdom of God.

In what ways have you experienced God working in "mysterious" ways in your life?

What do you think it means for someone to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord over his/her life?

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Week 9, Day 4: Christ—Bearing the Cross

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." (Mark 10:41-45)

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching his disciples on his journey to Jerusalem. He knew that his entry into Jerusalem would eventually lead to his rejection, arrest, and death. This news was not understood or accepted by his disciples. Jesus had an alternative vision of what the people needed in order to be restored to a covenant relationship with God. They thought they just needed to be freed from the foreign domination of Rome. They believed the answer would be found when Jesus rose to power as Israel's new king. They had not yet learned about the servant path of Jesus.

But let's be honest with ourselves. None of us hears news of Jesus' servant love easily. We would much rather have things our own way than to try to serve the interests of others. But Jesus loved by serving and taught others that God's blessing would be found in serving God and others.

Paul put it this way in one of his letters: Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave..." But this can be a difficult message to receive; everybody else

encourages us to look out for number one! We figure if we don't get what we can, then no one else will watch our backs.

The disciples discovered that they could trust Jesus to watch over them. That is why the resurrection is so important. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples to encourage them, to demonstrate that what passes for power in our world cannot hold him. We are given the mission of discovering the power of serving ministry!

What do you think is the most powerful thing about Jesus?

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Week 9, Day 5: Christ—Bearing the Cross

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free?'"

Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31-35)

Disciples as Children of God

Jesus calls us to follow him. What does that mean for us day after day? How do you attempt to follow Jesus in your daily life?

Jesus knew that we would find life with him to be a challenge. But he also gave us the promise that if we follow him, he would lead us into a truly free life. A lot of people think they are living free when they are controlled by a host of addictions and habits. What do you think of sin as a power that holds control of a person's life? What examples could you list of people you know who are controlled by their desires, addictions, jobs, habits, etc.? We are often much better at "doing what is right in our own eyes, doing our own thing."

Jesus invites us to a different kind of life: this is a life listening to him. As followers of Christ, we have the opportunity to grow closer and closer to Jesus. We can have a greater commitment to Jesus Christ today than we had yesterday. This happens as we spend more time with Jesus through reading and meditating on his words and actions; through prayer; through worship; and through meeting with and serving with his people. Jesus wants

you to grow closer to him. All you have to do is ask him to guide you and then begin practicing his ways. Jesus Christ will answer your prayer, affirm you as a son or daughter of God, and put his Spirit within you. Have you taken time to ask Christ to lead you, to make his word come alive for you, or give his Spirit to you? Don't be afraid to ask again!

List below what you think is involved with living life with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

What do you understand as necessary to be a follower of Jesus Christ?

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