

Recently, I arrived at home Connie had a strange look on her face and said, 'what are you doing here? You have a membership class, right now. Get back to church.' I grabbed my keys and started driving to church. I went about three blocks and then remembered that today's class was at 1 p.m. not 10 a.m. I reached a turning point because of correct information.

We are simply going segment by segment through the book of Mark.

- In the first half, we observed Jesus serving people through miracles, and preaching repentance.
- Today, we begin the second half, that clarifies that the Messiah is the suffering savior.
- This structure follows Mark's key verse is: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NIV).'

Last Sunday's climatic revelation by Peter, 'You are the Messiah (Mk 8:29 NLT),' is immediately clarified today.

- Before the disciples get too far down the road, Jesus gives them more information to turn around their assumptions about the Messiah's role.
- To make sure his readers do not miss the turning point, Mark repeats it three times; it is a clear pattern:<sup>1</sup> Jesus or Peter makes an announcement, followed by failure to understand, and ends with a call to humility or suffering.

Triplet Pattern ...

1. Three announcements

- 'You are the Messiah (8:29).'
- First prophecy of death & resurrection (9:31).
- Second prophecy of death (10:33-34).

2. Three failures

- 'Get behind me, Satan (8:32).'
- 'Did not understand (9:32).'
- Sit on your left and right (10:37).

3. Three calls to suffering / humility

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 293.

- 'Take up cross (8:34-38).'
- 'First will be last (9:35).'
- 'To be great ... must be your servant (10:43).'

Today's segment is a call to radical discipleship, a commitment that requires great belief.

## Discipleship & Belief

Mark 8:31-9:29



Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah is followed by this:

### 1. Suffering Messiah, 8:31-33.

'Then Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead.<sup>32</sup> As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things.<sup>33</sup> Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, then reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan!" he said. "You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's (Mk 8:31-33 NLT)."'

Popular Jewish thought was that the Messiah was a political / military leader who would overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as a great nation. It was their hope. Jesus must change the disciples' minds about what it means to be the Messiah to understand God's plan of salvation. Their assumptions must be remade to fit with God's plan.

Jesus has told them do 'not to tell anyone about him (8:30).'

 This time we know why:

- It was not necessary for people to know he was the Messiah until after his death and resurrection.
- John records the people intended to 'make him king by force (Jn 6:15).'
 If the people knew who he was before he completed his father's will, it might hurt God's plan.

'Son of Man' has many meanings. It can be as simple 'me,' or it can refer to Daniel's prophecy of a glorious God who rules over all. Peter's strong protest means he is thinking of Daniel's 'Son of Man.'

Jesus' challenge was to get them to see that before Daniel's glorious Son of Man, there was Isaiah's suffering servant (Is 52:13-53:12).

Isaiah prophesied that God's servant would be disfigured, suffer, punished, afflicted, pierced, crushed, and wounded. He would be 'cut off from the land of the living (Is 53:8).'

- Here, Jesus predicts his own horrible death and suffering.

Daniel prophesied that 'There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven ...

<sup>14</sup>He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Da 7:13-14 NIV).'

- There is going to be victory over evil – but it is through the shame of the cross.  
The cross precedes the crown.

It takes faith to see that the suffering and crucified Jesus is also the majestic Son of Man.

The glorious Messiah must first fulfill the role of a suffering savior. 'The way of the cross is the will of God.'<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then asks for total and similar commitment to the cross.

## **2. Committed Discipleship, 8:34-9:1.**

'Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. <sup>36</sup>And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? <sup>37</sup>Is anything worth more than your soul? <sup>38</sup>If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." <sup>1</sup>Jesus went on to say, "I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power (Mk 8:34-9:1 NLT)!"'

This is not just for the early disciples. It is almost as if Jesus is looking over the shoulders of this crowd to those a far off, to you and me. It is normal for us as Christ-followers to be ridiculed and endure suffering.

There are three quick word pictures:

- Cross (v. 34) - we must pick up the cross. Wow. Shocking. 'The horrifying image (is) of a death march ... a condemned man going out to die who is forced to carry on his back the cross-beam upon which he is to be nailed.'<sup>3</sup> The most important

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<sup>2</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 304.

factor in our Christian walk is that we no longer live for self, but surrender to the will of God.

- Life (v. 35) – again, followers are to give up their earthly lives to gain eternal life.
- Ledger (vv. 36-37) – businessmen seek profit. Towards that end, they evaluate every decision by the ledger. The human soul is of great value, whereas things of this world are of little value.

Courage is required to stand up for Jesus. If we are faithful, we will share in Jesus' glory when he returns.

This calling is tough; here is no middle ground, so, Jesus gives them a little appetizer of his future glory.

### **3. Glory, 9:2-8.**

'Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed,<sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, far whiter than any earthly bleach could ever make them.<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah and Moses appeared and began talking with Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, it's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."<sup>6</sup> He said this because he didn't really know what else to say, for they were all terrified.<sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to him."<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus with them (Mk 9:2-8 NLT).'"

This experience ...

1. Allows the disciples to see Jesus' future glory; it confirms Peter's declaration of Jesus as the glorious Son of Man. Peter gets so excited that he blurts out something stupid.
2. Peter, James, and John are witnesses. Any testimony must be verified by two or three people. These are now qualified to serve as witnesses after the resurrection. The presence of Moses and Elijah, the two most important figures in the OT, lends their credibility to Jesus.
3. There is a parallel with the OT cloud / tabernacle and Jesus. God's providence and protection was clearly seen. But, on the other hand, it was hidden in the cloud. Jesus' role as the suffering servant would be clear to all, but his majesty is hidden until the second coming.

The disciples still do not understand ...

### **4. Elijah, 9:9-13.**

‘As they went back down the mountain, he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So they kept it to themselves, but they often asked each other what he meant by “rising from the dead.” <sup>11</sup> Then they asked him, “Why do the teachers of religious law insist that Elijah must return before the Messiah comes?” <sup>12</sup> Jesus responded, “Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready. Yet why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be treated with utter contempt? <sup>13</sup> But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they chose to abuse him, just as the Scriptures predicted (9:9-13 NLT).”

- The Jewish religious leaders correctly taught that Elijah would come before the Messiah (Mal 4:6).
- They envisioned the actual Elijah coming back from heaven (2Ki 2:17). The disciples were still wondering if Jesus was Elijah even though they just saw Elijah.
- But Jesus infers that John the Baptist is an Elijah-like figure.
- This whole idea of the Messiah dying was incomprehensible to them – even after God’s voice affirmed Jesus’ sonship.

Our assumptions are dangerous and hard to undo, that is why God goes to great lengths to get us to understand his will and his grace.

Powerful spiritual experiences seem like mountaintops. Biblically, it is on the mountains where we meet with God, but we live and work in the valleys. If the mount of transfiguration was like a great worship service, this next story is Monday morning.

## **5. Prayer & Faith, 9:14-29.**

‘When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him. <sup>16</sup> “What is all this arguing about?” Jesus asked. <sup>17</sup> One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, “Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won’t let him talk. <sup>18</sup> And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn’t do it (Mk 9:14-18 NLT).”

Just like the disciples, we are to pick up the cross, die to ourselves. This story is about unwavering faith and belief in Jesus. We are powerless, but Jesus is powerful.

It is likely that the scribes and disciples were arguing about the source of Jesus’ power, and their inability to cast this demon. It caused a downward spiral of faith for these disciples and the father.

- You can hear the scribes ridiculing the disciples in the background.

- Earlier the twelve disciples had been successful in casting out demons (6:7, 13), but this time it was different.
- This demon was determined to deface the image of God in the boy and kill him.
- There appears to be an increase of demonic activity, and this demon had a powerful grip on this child.

'Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." <sup>20</sup>So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup>"How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy. <sup>22</sup>The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." <sup>23</sup>"What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." <sup>24</sup>The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup>When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!" <sup>26</sup>Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." <sup>27</sup>But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up (Mk 9:19-27 NLT).'

Right on cue, the demon tries to kill the boy.

Faith is about trusting God and not trusting in faith by itself or trusting ourselves.

Perhaps, 'the disciples had been tempted to believe that the gift they had received from Jesus (6:7) was in their control and could be exercised at their disposal ... (they could) trust in themselves rather than God.'<sup>4</sup>

- There are no magical words to twist God's arm by faith – that would be more like witchcraft than the Spirit-filled faith.
- But when we hear a nudging of the Holy Spirit to believe, we should have complete trust in God's voice. It is his power. It is his will, not mine. He even gives us faith to believe.

This father's humble faith - 'I believe, help my unbelief' - is our example today. God's glory is seen only when we are out of human resources.

'Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?" <sup>29</sup>Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer (Mk 9:28-29 NLT).'"

Prayer is what connects us to God's power; it is the source of spiritual power.

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 335.

## Conclusion.

Financial Advisor Dave Ramsey has a saying: 'live like no one else, so that you can live like no one else.' By this he means, restrain your spending now, live within your means now, avoid debt now, so that you can have a great life later.

We have seen a similar pattern in Mark.

- John the Baptist suffered but received honor in heaven (Mt 11:11).
- Jesus instructed the disciples to die pick up a cross and die to earthly things, but he promised, 'everyone who has left ... (earthly things behind) for my sake will receive a hundred time as much and will inherit eternal life (Mt 19:29 NIV).'
- Jesus had to die to defeat sin and death. He had to dethrone Satan by exercising power through suffering.
- Isaiah's suffering servant comes before Daniel's glorious Son of Man.
- The cross always precedes a crown in the kingdom of God.

Maybe you expected a sermon on 'The 5 Steps to Your Best Life Now.' I am sorry, but this is what the Bible really teaches. The cross always precedes a crown in the kingdom of God – for us today, too.

The disciples were learning, 'Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory (Lk 24:26 NIV)? Today we are learning that 'If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Ro 8:17 NIV).'

A long time ago in Tokyo, it was my privilege to pray with an Iranian Christian. He said, 'Business brought me here for three weeks. These three weeks have been wonderful. For the first time in my life, I attended worshipped publicly with my brothers and sisters and lifted my voice to sing praise. Can you pray for me? I am going back this week, and I want to be brave. When I am found out as a Christian, I want to stand firm even if I die. I do not renounce my faith in Jesus or embarrass the name of Jesus.' Emotionally, I could hardly intercede for him as I fought the tears. Here was a brother, a man of similar faith who wanted prayer from me. I felt spiritually small before him. The cross precedes the crown in the kingdom of God.

Prayer to recommit to a radical discipleship, suffering if the Lord wills it. Do you really believe there is an eternal glory on the other side of this suffering life.