

CIC 4-7-24

kid choose Oreo over 10000 dollars (youtube.com)

I've made decisions like that. How often do we choose earthly rather than eternal?

We are reading through Mark's biography. In reading these large segments we observe that ...

- In the first half, Jesus served people through miracles, deliverances, and preaching repentance. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) is the turning point to the second half.
- In the second half, Jesus is the suffering savior who purchases our salvation with his life.
- Our 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 NLT).'

For the last two Sundays we jumped ahead to fit in with Palm Sunday and Easter. Today, we go back to where we left off, chapter 9:30.

Jesus just about to head towards Jerusalem, but now he is focused on training and teaching his closest followers. His principles are the opposite of the world's. Disciples must ...

- Deny themselves.
- Take up their cross.
- Lose their life.
- Invest in eternal rather than temporary things (Mk 8:34-38).

Today's message counters two impulses inside each one of us: pride and exclusiveness. Jesus teaches that we must be humble and live in peace with others.

Humility & Peace

Mark 9:30-50

Let's jump right in.

1. Death Prophesied, 9:30-32.

'Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, ³¹ for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into



the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.”³² They didn’t understand what he was saying, however, and they were afraid to ask him what he meant (Mk 9:30-32 NLT).’

This is the second time he prophesies that he will be killed and rise from the dead. This time he adds that he will fall into the hands of his enemies. Jesus’ disciples would have known that ‘handing over’ means. It means ...

- Betrayal.
- Suffering.
- And somewhere in the background, God’s approval. ‘Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted ...⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Is 53:4, 6 NIV).’ God has a purpose he is working out in the background of our lives (Pro 19:21).

Jesus pulls completely away from the crowds to prepare his disciples. He must get them ready for his death.

- The disciples just cannot envision Jesus’ death or his greater mission to bring salvation, but they do have a sense of dread or fear.
- You can feel a sense the urgency towards Jerusalem in this little segment. It is like packing before a trip, there are a thousand details to prepare: hold the mail at the PO, someone to care for the animals, and pick up the dry cleaning.

Let’s continue.

2. Humility, 9:33-37.

‘After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, “What were you discussing out on the road?”³⁴ But they didn’t answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest.³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, “Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else.”³⁶ Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me (Mk 9:33-37 NLT).”

The remainder of today’s portion occurs in a house in Capernaum.

- They did not have printed Bibles, and certainly not a Bible app, so they relied on memory to retell the story to each other. There are several repeated phrases and ideas, likely to help with memorization.¹

Memorization points ...

- 'In my name,' vv. 37, 38, 39, 41.
- Children, vv. 37 & 42.
- 'It would be better', vv. 42-47.
- 'Salt & fire,' vv. 48-50.

Jesus asks them a direct question, one which they are embarrassed to answer. They don't want Jesus to know they are concerned about status and rank.

- I don't think they misunderstood Jesus' teaching as much as they didn't care. This was a great opportunity for them to 'get ahead,' or so they thought.
- Being with the Messiah fed their pride.

The practical application of Jesus' teaching is a reversal of everything: the greatest is the least. It is also a model for our interpersonal relationships:

- **The cross before the crown.** 'You must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me (Mk 8:34 NLT).'
- **Service before glory.** 'Serve one another humbly in love (Ga 5:13 NIV).'
- **Generosity before self.** 'Love your neighbor as yourself (Le 19:18 NIV).'

Jesus lifts a child as an illustration. It is interesting that Jesus spoke Aramaic and the word for child is the same as servant. There is an intentional blurring of the two.

Children have some remarkable gifts:

- Children can play and pretend to be a pirate or a schoolteacher, but they have no pretension to greatness. While having vivid imaginations they are very aware of reality.
- Children also have a great capacity to believe. They have not learned mistrust.
- In other words, they are humble and know their status.

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 338.

Matthew's retelling adds a detail: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:3 NIV).'

Some in ministry desire great publicity or position. Those striving for position should not be given position because they are filled with pride instead of humility. 'Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up (Ja 4:10 NIV).'

- True leadership and discipleship require a childlike perspective: knowing your role as servant/child before our powerful God.
- True ministry greatness is humble.

Next the content of Jesus' teaching changes from humility to peace.

3. Peace, 9:38-41.

'John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn't in our group." ³⁹"Don't stop him!" Jesus said. "No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Anyone who is not against us is for us (Mk 9:38-40 NLT).'"

It is interesting that after each time Jesus prophesied about his death, a named disciple followed it up with a response.

The closest disciples did not understand ...

1. Mk 8:31 & 32 – Peter's rebuke.
2. Mk 9:31 & 38 – John's question about 'a man driving out demons.'
3. Mk 10:33-34 & 37 – James & John's request to sit at the right / left hand.

The point is probably that even the three closest disciples did not understand who Jesus really was nor his mission.

Here, John's question was about authorization, organizational purity, and exclusivity. They even took it upon themselves to tell the man to stop helping people. Their attitude was divisive.

- While it is true that only the twelve had been commissioned by Jesus, just a few days ago they could not cast out a demon (9:14-18); they were powerless and filled with unbelief. Jesus said, 'this kind can be cast out only by prayer (Mk 9:29).'
- There is an OT parallel here. The Holy Spirit came down and 70 of Israel's elders who began to prophesy (Nu 11:25-29). Two others had remained in camp, and they also began to prophesy. Word reached Joshua who said to Moses, 'Stop

them (v. 28).’ But Moses replied, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them (Nu 11:29 NIV)!’

I do not want to be misunderstood here. Just as there is truth and heresy, there are correct ways to worship and empty rituals. However, ‘Jesus opposed the narrow exclusiveness of the Twelve with an open and generous spirit.’²

- On the one hand, good theology helps us understand God, his works, and even our place in creation.
- But, on the other hand, we will never have perfect theology because our mind and categories of understanding are limited. ‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine (Is 55:8 NIV).”
- Therefore, we are to live peaceably with other Christians.

Here was someone doing good - setting people free from the demonic - and here they are worried about who was in the club and who was not. Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid!’ Indeed, this outsider recognized and was using Jesus’ authority.

- Yes, there are distinctions among the various churches, but you can tell those who truly worship our God and those who worship the god of this age.
- God has a big kingdom. I remember when we finally got a seven day a week rental for the church in Tokyo. I apologized to the Japanese AG leaders that I had to move the church 3 train stops away. I said, ‘there was already a church in the neighborhood,’ in a disappointed voice. They got excited. They were not worried about competition. They said, ‘Great. There are other Christians walking the ground and praying there. It will be easier there.’ What is important is the kingdom of God and another local church meant there was a spiritual beachhead.
- Jesus deals with their pride and their exclusiveness when he states, ‘If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I tell you the truth, that person will surely be rewarded (Mk 9:41 NLT).’
- Service in God’s kingdom is not ranked on scale from important and unimportant. Even the servant / child who serves water is rewarded. There is no distinction between apostle and custodian. Faithfulness to our calling is the grading system.

² Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 343.

There should be no divisions in the body of Christ. Numerous times Paul says, 'Live at peace with everyone (Ro 12:18 NIV).'³ True greatness is a humble and peaceful heart.

Continuing.

4. Discipleship, 9:42-50.

“But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone hung around your neck (Mk 9:42 NLT).”

Here we face a double meaning: who are the little ones? It could equally be the children he is holding, or it could mean the man casting out demons who is not a part of their group. Regardless, he gives them a stern warning to not cause others to fall away.

Little ones, whether a child or a new believer, have great potential because they carry the image of God and have the potential of growth. Just as a child will grow into an adult, new believers can grow to become mighty men and women of God.

It continues ...

‘If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. ⁴⁵If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸‘where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.’ ⁴⁹“For everyone will be tested with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good for seasoning. But if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty again? You must have the qualities of salt among yourselves and live in peace with each other (Mk 9:43-50 NLT).”

This is a strong call to holiness. We are not to get ourselves ensnared with sin. We should understand it considering the ‘Palestinian custom to (not) refer to an abstract activity but (refer) to the specific member of the body which is responsible for it.’⁴ So ...

- Cutting off the hand is a way of saying theft.
- Cutting off the foot is a way of saying going to a bar or prostitute.

Faith is embodied in our actions, not just our thoughts; there is a concrete realism to Jesus’ statement. Our faith has to be lived out; it is not just a system of belief.

³ 1Co 7:15; 2Co 13:11, 1Ti 2:2; He 12:14.

⁴ Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 347.

- No, he is not saying to literally cut these members off, he is saying eternity is that important compared with a few moments of pleasure or escape.

Jesus' call to a radical discipleship is not just to avoid hell, but to endure persecution. Jesus' word pictures of fire, testing, and salt reveal this.

Fire, testing, salting ...

- Mark wrote to Christians in Rome, 60-70 A.D. Perhaps rumors of a big fire in Rome had reached Mark.
- Nero's fire in Rome was July 18th, 64 A.D. The city burned for 6 days, then reignited for another 3 days, destroying 71% of Rome. Nero blamed the Christians and then rebuilt his palace with a newly discovered material that was impervious to fire, concrete.

We know Mark is encouraging his fellow believers in Rome to endure persecution.

Mark's strategy is for them to really know Jesus.

- If we really know who Jesus is and are radically committed to him, then we will endure persecution.
- As Paul wrote, 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2Co 4:17-18 NIV).'

True greatness is a humble and peaceful heart.

The world is watching. We should live at peace with one another and not worry about position or rank.

Conclusion.

Three years ago, I told you about the large Monopoly boards I made for an outreach in Tokyo in 1992. Amazingly enough, they were used 25 years later in 2018 at Tokyo University by Joyce Kitano.



My Japanese was weak at the time, but we had a lot of fun at the outreach.

- One distinguished man read the tract I had written and asked me a question about Mk 8:36: 'What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul (Mk 8:36 NLT)?'

- I explained that the only thing that could pay the debt we owe God for our sins, was Jesus' pure and holy sacrifice on our behalf.
- Somehow, I stumbled upon the phrase 'eternally bankrupt.' It really shook him up. He said, 'so every day in eternity, I am unable to pay the debt I owe - every day.'
- It turns out he was a seeker and worked in finance. His great grandfather was on ¥5,000 yen. That game and conversation was a significant step towards his salvation.



What about you? 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Ro 3:23-24 NIV).'